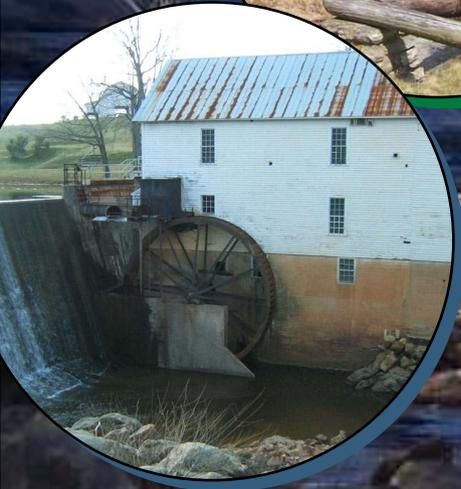


GREATER HICKORY RECREATION/ TOURISM PLAN



WESTERN PIEDMONT
COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS
UNIFOUR RECREATION AND
OPEN SPACE TASK FORCE



GREATER
HICKORY
METRO

DECEMBER 2006



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Greater Hickory Recreation/Tourism Plan
Western Piedmont Council of Governments



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1.1 Purpose of Plan

The Greater Hickory Recreation/Tourism Plan is intended to achieve the goal to develop a strategy, built upon community consensus, for repositioning the region's economy by leveraging the natural, cultural, and recreational resources for sustainable economic growth and prosperity. Located in the foothills of North Carolina and consisting of Alexander, Burke, Caldwell and Catawba counties, the Greater Hickory Metro Area is experiencing a transition from a predominately manufacturing to more of a service based economy. At this point in time, there is a great opportunity to take advantage of the natural and recreation resources in the area to help supplement and maximize the potential of the local economy.

The Catawba River is the common thread that touches all four counties in the region and, along with the surrounding lakes, mountains, rivers, streams, parks, greenway corridors, presents a unified infrastructure to support the newly defined natural and recreation based economy. This tourism oriented economy can create new jobs and define the "**Greater Hickory Region**" as a strong and attractive regional destination point to visit and live. The plan identifies strategies for maximizing the various ways that the natural and recreation resources can have a positive impact on the local economy.

This study is a strategic document that is region-wide in scope and in many cases does not examine park specific issues. It gives direction to achieve the highest standards in providing opportunities for outdoor recreational activities and protection of the natural environment. Further detail analysis and studies are advised for individual projects and site specific improvement needs.

1.2 Significance of the Region

This regional strategy is much more than a parks and greenways master plan. More and more citizens in the region recognize and are dedicated to preserving the region's natural environment and open space. In addition, tourism is the most important component for this region to take advantage of the natural resources and extensive opportunities for outdoor recreation. The Greater Hickory Region has been far below the state level for tourism in both present and growth projection levels. Historically the Greater Hickory Region has actively promoted tourism primarily in the furniture industry and the international furniture market was once held in the region at several venues. Today, many visitors still come to the region to take advantage of the local manufacturer's showrooms and discounts keeping the rich heritage of that industry alive.

Recently however, with the rise in internet sales and the loss of manufacturing jobs in the three major industry sectors (furniture, textile, and cable) in the region, the community leaders have redirected to emphasize a more diversified economic base. As the Future Forward Alliance report states; "Economic Diversity involves developing strengths in all parts of the economy to insulate our community against future economic downturns." That report continues, "...we have relatively easy access to natural and outdoor amenities—such as the Blue Ridge Mountains, Lake James and Lake Norman, and Linville Gorge—which we must protect at the same time that we take full advantage of the economic opportunities they (and other outdoor assets) offer."

This region is blessed with abundant natural resources within its boundaries. The August 2006 issue of Outdoor Magazine focused on the "Best Outside Towns" as determined by their location and resources. In comparison to those communities and their resources listed in the article, the Greater Hickory Region has several of the same resources. Six of the communities and their resources listed in that article include:

- **Bellingham, Washington**—Brings in *paddlers* because of open lakes and scenery.
- **New Platz, New York**—*Rock climbers* destination close to New York city.
- **Durango, Colorado**—*Mountain biking* with 40- and 42-mile treks.
- **Madison, Wisconsin**—30 miles of *bike paths* and 110 miles of *bike lanes*.
- **Bend, Oregon**—48 mile in-town *trail* and 11 mile trail along Deschutes River.
- **Asheville, North Carolina**—*Kayaking* due to several whitewater runs within an hour.



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Additionally it was noted that these communities were successful in redirecting or transitioning their economies as well. The significance of this benchmark comparison is that this region has each of these resources, but has not taken advantage, marketed, or fully developed the opportunities they present. By understanding what these communities have done by capitalizing their natural resources, we can focus on the best opportunities in the Greater Hickory Region.

Besides the economic value of marketing the region for tourism, open space, and natural resource access carries benefits to increase the quality of life aspects or indicators. This is important because it fosters a healthy environment, which in turn attracts people to the region. The promotion and enhancement of our natural resources serves as an additional business and industry recruitment tool. Many of today's industries seeking new locations or to relocate look for communities which have outdoor amenities that incorporate the idea of healthier lifestyles. Active outdoor recreation combined with vibrant lifestyle amenities (walkable streets and distinct neighborhoods for example) attract employees of the new economy/knowledge businesses. High tech companies, for example, list the "quality of life" aspect high on their site evaluations. By creating the connected multiple use trail system throughout the region emphasizes the region's relationship with the environment and active outdoor lifestyle. This does not stop with industry relocation; it creates an atmosphere for targeting several development sectors including office, resort destination, medical, high tech, retirement communities, and residential development projects which are attracted to potential outdoor recreation opportunities.

Another benefit to embracing the active outdoor development options presented within this report has to do with our health. Obesity and related health issues we are facing today cost several million dollars in related costs each year. Insurance, medical needs, hospital visits, and pharmaceuticals costs are all on the rise due to an increased demand based on a more sedentary lifestyle. Opening up the outdoor recreational opportunities by promoting access, connectivity, and ease of use will bring people outdoors. When these resources are convenient to the users and they know about them, active levels rise. How many times do we see today that people drive to a walking track or health club to exercise? These proposals are also meant to encourage people and their children to become more active and over time, become healthier.

This is a very diverse region and offers a wide range of activities to all people. For four years, the PGA Champions Tour has come to Rock Barn Golf and Spa, but the area also hosts Bass Tournaments on the Catawba River lakes. The Western Piedmont Symphony has been established for many years, but bluegrass fiddler concerts and festivals are a part of the region's cultural history. These are just two examples of the varied community interests in the region—there is something for everyone and opposites do attract.

1.3 Regional Resources and Opportunities

1.3.1 Cultural and Historic

The region is steep in history and the various cultures who have called the Catawba River Valley their home. The Catawba Indians were indigenous to the area and archeologists have discovered several villages and encampments within the valley. These archeological digs have also recently produced the remains of a 1500s era Spanish conquistador fort north of the Catawba River which was established as a post adjacent to a primary Catawba tribe settlement.

Officially dedicated in 1980, the Overmountain Victory National Historic Trail was the Revolutionary Militia route from Virginia to the Battle of Kings Mountain in 1780. Several miles of this historic route is located in Caldwell and Burke counties, with two trails merging into one west of Morganton and then proceeding south. Bunker Hill Covered Bridge and Murray's Mill in Catawba County are significant historic resources highlighting transportation and agricultural/commercial development in the region in the 1800s. The Catawba Valley pottery industry was one of only three major regions in the state to provide earthenware and stoneware made in the 18th and 19th centuries. Known for the area's signature alkaline glaze, the pottery industry now thrives as a distinctive folk art featuring highly collectable "face jugs" as well as utilitarian pieces.



OVNHT Marker



Burlon Craig Pottery



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Yadkin Valley is an area rich in cultural resources. Revolutionary War General William Lenoir built his residence Fort Defiance in the valley. It has been restored and is open for tours, along with several outbuildings to demonstrated pioneer life. Civil War era Tom Dula was immortalized by the popular folk song “Hang your Head Tom Dooley.” He was accused of murdering his girlfriend, Laura Foster, and was hanged. Laura Foster’s grave is marked and located in the valley. This area has been known for its scenery, long standing farms, National Historic Register properties, folklife traditions which are still commonplace (molasses making, draft horses and buggies, handicrafts and music.



Fort Defiance

Several municipalities have made great strides to protect and restore their historic and cultural resources. Endeavors include the Town of Valdese and the development of their Waldensian Trail of Faith and amphitheatre, Morganton and Lenoir’s downtown redevelopment, Hickory and Newton’s historic neighborhoods, the Hiddenite Center, Hart Square and the Catawba County Historical Museum are just a sampling of what is being done in the region. This region’s cultural heritage is rich and diverse.



Waldensian Trail of Faith



A part of the National Park System, the 469 mile Blue Ridge Parkway travels through two of the region’s northern most areas, around Grandfather Mountain on the unique Linn Cove Viaduct and at the northern edge of the Linville Gorge. This project was begun in the 1930s and took more than 50 years to be completed

connecting Shenandoah National Park in Virginia with the Great Smoky Mountains National Park in North Carolina. The Blue Ridge Parkway is designated as an All-American Road by American Byways, one of 23 in the country.

There are many more of important cultural and historic resources that are not specifically mentioned here. The abundance of such opportunities in the region can be found in every county and hamlet. From the local festivals and bluegrass gatherings to re-enactments of historical events, the region’s local heritage is significant and noteworthy.

1.3.2 Natural Resources

There are exceptionally beautiful natural environments in the region including the mountains, agricultural land, water resources and natural ridge lines and valley habitats. Located in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains, this region enjoys a mixture of rolling hills, pastures, and creekside basins in the south and eastern sections of the region to rugged mountains, river valleys and isolated coves in the north and western sections. The Catawba River, which flows directly through the middle of the region, has been a significant resource for many generations. From the early development of native villages through the pioneers of the 18th Century, then the industrial development, the impoundment lakes system, the river and its tributaries have been an integral part of the region.



Grandfather Mountain

Grandfather Mountain is the tallest peak in the Blue Ridge Mountains and forms the northern tip of Caldwell County. The mountain rises over 4,000 feet above the Catawba River Valley, and due to the considerable elevation gain the mountain has sixteen distinct ecological communities. Several more



CHAPTER 1 – EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

mountain peaks form a distinct natural horizon in the region’s western sky. Table Rock and Hawksbill in Burke County are noteworthy features on the eastern ridge of the Linville Gorge and offer scenic views. South Mountains State Park, Pisgah National Forest, Ripshin Mountain, Bakers Mountain; these, along with many more, attract hikers to the region to enjoy the trails and scenery. The photograph on the previous page shows Grandfather Mountain and the Linn Cove Viaduct of the Blue Ridge Parkway (courtesy of Grandfather Mountain).

The lake system in the region, from Lake James to Lake Rhodhiss, Lake Hickory, and Lookout Shoals offer a variety of opportunities which differ from lake to lake. Lake James, at the top of the chain, has the most pristine water quality with the 3000+ acre state park is known for its scenic beauty. Lake Rhodhiss is at the beginning of being “discovered” by the development community and is popular place for fishing and boating. Lake Hickory is very active for boating and fishing, but has very limited public access due to the extensive development along the shoreline. Lookout Shoals is the smallest of these resources and offers an increasing amount of public access with Riverbend Park along with partial housing development. Not only are these lakes noteworthy from the scenic and activity perspective, they are all designated water supply resources for the growing population in the region.



Lake James



Hawksbill from Wisemans View on NC 105



Scenic drives have been designated by the state in the region including NC 105, NC 268 and the Blue Ridge Parkway. The majestic mountains and scenic river valleys form the backbone of the natural

resources for the Greater Hickory Region. These are the distinguishing characteristics that give the region its identity and notability. Recreation opportunities can be found in large areas such as Wilson Creek Gorge to the small enclaves such as municipal parks. The region is increasing their efforts to identify, protect and make accessible these natural resources to the community and tourists.

1.3.3 Recreational Resources

Table 1 indicates the participation and spending information for outdoor recreation as reported by the Outdoor Industry Association for 2002. The highlighted activities can be found in the Greater Hickory Region and those with an asterisk are the growing activities throughout the nation. Each of the growth activities, with the exception of cross-country skiing, is found in the region. The 2006 Outdoor Industry Foundation summary data (www.outdoorindustryfoundation.org) indicates continued growth in Bird Watching, Canoeing, Rafting, Non-whitewater Kayaking, Climbing, Hiking, and Trail Running, all of which can be found in the region.

Table 1: Outdoor Recreation Participation and Spending Study—Outdoor Industry Association 2002

Activity	NC Rank	Per Capital Participation	Number of Participants
Overview Outdoor	39	62.5%	3,931,989
Backpacking	19	7.6%	478,130*
Bicycling (Paved)	38	25.0%	1,572,796
Bicycling (Dirt)	31	14.3%	899,639*
Bicycling (Mountain)	25	16.5%	1,038,045*
Bird Watching	32	7.1%	446,674
Camping	44	3.6%	226,483
Car Camping	37	16.1%	1,012,880
Canoeing	38	6.7%	421,509*
Climbing (Nat. Rock)	13	2.7%	169,862*
Climbing (Art. Wall)	37	0.9%	56,621
Climbing (Ice)	14	1.3%	81,785
Fly Fishing	25	5.4%	339,724
Hiking	36	29.0%	1,824,443*
Kayaking (Recreation)	15	2.7%	169,862*
Kayaking (Sea)	17	3.1%	195,027
Kayaking (Whitewater)	13	1.8%	113,241
Rafting	26	5.4%	339,724*
Skiing (Cross-Country)	34	2.7%	169,862*
Skiing (Telemark)	26	0.9%	56,621
Snowshoeing	32	1.3%	81,785
Trail Running	14	20.1%	1,264,528*

*growing activities (Nationwide)



Recreational sporting activities are also present in the region. Youth sports including baseball, softball, basketball, football and soccer have several organized leagues. A number of adult softball leagues are also in the region with competition and recreational leagues. A number of fields are available for play, but according to the information gathered, do not meet the demand for use.

1.4 Summary of Recommendations

The region faces growth potential and pressures and needs to create ways to accommodate future development while enhancing and preserving environmental quality to attract tourism and recreational opportunities. Each component of the process is interrelated and interdependent upon one another. Our process emphasizes the components to be studied together, and not as individual stand-alone assignments. Detailed information is found throughout the study. The following sections offer a quick glance at the general recommendations for the Greater Hickory Recreation/Tourism Plan.

1.5 Regional Structure and Organization

- Need a clearinghouse for information—who and what—for the region, not just a county; need to know all programming, activities, festivals going on in the region and have one place to access information. Network/link all visitor centers, CVBs, Chambers, etc.
- Work directly with the Tom Reese School for Environment Science at Lenoir Rhyne College; the Center for the Environment at Catawba College and the Centralina COG’s Sustainable Environment for Quality of Life (QOL).
- Tie into regional initiatives: Vision 2020 Open Space Framework, Catawba Regional Trail, “Land for Tomorrow” State Initiative, Blue Ridge National Heritage Area, Blue Ridge Parkway, Mountains-to-Sea Trail, the OVNHT and future Passenger Rail Service.
- Continue the Open Space Task Force as the lead board—transition into a representative board with funding, planning, and authority to make decisions on a regional basis (similar to the MPO organization with acting TAC and TCC committees responsible for regional transportation planning).

1.6 Implementation Techniques

- Critical to design and implement consistent tourist/wayfinding signage and brochure package.
- Provide constant stream of new activities coming on-line to keep interest. Develop/advise of events to attract people during different seasons.
- Convert inventory map into an Internet Tool. Make all points hot-links so when its selected, it opens an information page with a picture, directions, activities, etc. and others points on the map with similar activities are highlighted.
- Establish one, three, and five day itineraries with maps, guides, etc. for various activities. Orient them to specific groups like developing a “Family Tour” package.
- Establish a “Geo-caching” hunt—a high tech GPS scavenger hunt, include many points of interest. Can be an innovative way to expose many places in the region.
- Establish “themed” trails—wildlife, flora, birding, heritage, history, and folk—over a region or area.
- Sponsor a “professional” to participate in an event (i.e., Editor from Cycle Magazine in the Bridge-to-Bridge) for marketing purposes
- Establish a connected Greenway/Sidewalk system, expand, and connect Paddle Blueway system, a connected Bikeway system throughout the region.
- Designate destinations, both present and future.
- In Catawba and Alexander counties, prepare an in depth/detailed “Heritage Development Plan” similar to those prepared by Caldwell and Burke counties in association with the Blue Ridge National Heritage Area.
- Establish a regional active sports network—link facilities and market with softball/baseball and soccer fields available within 20 minutes of each other.
- Expand on the “10 Minutes from Urban to Wilderness” theme.



CHAPTER 2 – OVERVIEW OF PREVIOUS PLANNING INITIATIVES AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS

2.1 Summary of Planning Documents

In an effort to gain a complete understanding of the area, it was important to gather and review land planning, recreation, tourism and economic plans and/or initiatives completed in the four-county region. A total of forty-five planning documents were reviewed from municipalities, counties and non-profit organizations, which ranged from comprehensive plans to small area plans and heritage plans. As an extension to the local plans we received, a number of regional plans, such as the Blue Ridge National Heritage Plan, were gathered and reviewed. These regional plans included portions of the four-county study area for the Greater Hickory Metro, but were valuable to associate connections to this study region. A completed listing of the initial planning documents reviewed as a part of this study can be found in Appendix A.

The land planning documents gave us an overview of the growth and development issues within the region. Primarily the recreation and open space elements were examined within the comprehensive plans that were reviewed. Since these types of plans deal with large areas, an entire city or county, they generally give an overview of information, policies or directives. Small area plans dealt directly with defined geographical areas or sites, which gave detailed insight on potential development plans and/or recommendations. The regional plans which covered the study area were very broad-based and assisted in defining regional assets and direction of the region. Overall in the initial forty-five planning documents reviewed, thirteen were land use based (nine comprehensive, and four small area plan); twenty-seven were recreation based plans; and then remaining five were other types of planning documents including economic, market, facility feasibility and community surveys.

Although too broad of an information base to detail in this study, the underlying tone in these plans was an increased need for open space preservation and park/facility need. This chapter is intended to provide as a quick guide or reference to these plans. The detailed information presented were a benefit in the compilation of the Greater Hickory Recreation/Tourism Plan. However, this chapter does duplicate or consolidate that information. For detailed information pertaining to a certain geographical area, natural resources, or recreation amenity; for example, one should refer to the specific plan documents, which are referenced throughout the plan. A primary goal of the Recreation/Tourism Plan explains how the various assets of the region relate and interact with one another and how these assets can be improved and/or marketed to encourage economic development and environmental protection.

2.2 Planning Initiatives to Date

2.2.1 Regional Plans

The region has made considerable progress in planning and managing the natural environment through data inventories, open space/greenway planning and comprehensive planning efforts. One of the most significant plans in the regional perspective is the *Federal Energy Regulatory Commission Catawba-Wateree Project Comprehensive Relicensing Agreement* (FERC No. 2232) between Duke Energy and the affected counties, municipalities and other groups. Specific sections of the FERC Relicensing Agreement require certain water flows be maintained or reestablished and land acquired for public access and recreation to the Catawba River and its related tributaries and impoundments. For the Greater Hickory Region, this is substantial to opening access to the water resources and establishes recreational areas. The final agreement was approved for signatures in July 2006 and highlights include conservation easements and access requirements on the Johns, Catawba and Linville rivers and portions of their tributaries.



Lake Hickory

CHAPTER 2 – OVERVIEW OF PREVIOUS PLANNING INITIATIVES AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Future Forward Economic Alliance was an initiative by then Congressman Cass Ballenger to address the economic challenges of the thirteen-county region in the western piedmont (10th and 11th Congressional Districts) of North Carolina, centered on the Greater Hickory Metro. Dealing with the economic transition from manufacturing, the region created a vision and recommendations to create a strategy for economic diversity. The Future Forward study relates directly to this plan by recommending: the expansion of tourism; protection and development of outdoor and urban places to instill the high QOL in the region; economic development projects that embrace the environment as an asset; foster a renewed spirit of entrepreneurship; and smart governance that involves regional action and cooperation.

Another significant regional plan includes the *Blue Ridge Heritage Area Plan*, of which Burke and Caldwell counties are incorporated. This is one of twenty-seven heritage areas designated in the United States by Congress and administered by the National Park Service. According to their information, this regional initiative was “charged by Congress with developing a Management Plan that will chart a course for heritage preservation and development in Western North Carolina for the next ten years.” Both Burke and Caldwell counties have completed a heritage plan that provides an overview of local opportunities for heritage preservation and development.

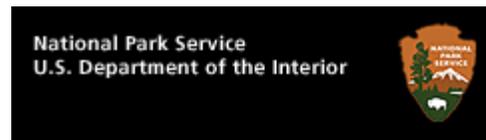


Two similar regional programs highlighting the agriculture, cultural and natural resources, tourism and crafts across the state are *Handmade in America* (Burke and Caldwell counties) and *Homegrown America* (Alexander and Catawba counties). These two programs work in cooperation with the North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service and the North Carolina Arts Council to support and build the Agricultural heritage throughout the state. These programs have established itineraries for themed driving trails supporting the agribusiness tourism and festivals for example.

Another strategic cooperative regional effort is *Voices and Choices of the Central Carolinas* which includes Catawba County within their planning area. Within the realm of this study there are economic and open space tactics that are incorporated and should be recommended to include the entire Greater Hickory Region, and not just Catawba County. Specifically the Strategic Regional Open Space Framework in a network of “green assets,” including parks, floodplains, habitat areas, heritage sites, trails and other linkages that are mapped and show a connected network throughout the thirteen county Charlotte Metropolitan Area. Within the recommendations included within the Greater Hickory Recreation/Tourism Plan, an integrated trail network is proposed and is tied to this regional open space framework.



Several other regional plans were part of this review including the Pisgah Forest Recreation Study (US Forest Service), Blue Ridge Parkway and Linville Falls Land Management and Recreation Plans (National Park Service), various documents and plans including the Mountains-to-Sea Bicycle Trail (NC Department of Transportation), and the Overmountain Victory



National Historic Trail all of which provided substantial information for this project.

2.2.2 County and Local Plans

Within the four-county region, a number of land use and recreation plans have been written to address the various needs and priorities within those particular communities. Comprehensive land use, parks and recreation, corridor and site specific plans all contribute to the information and recommendations contained within this plan. Several plans developed by the local governments and non-profit agencies have done an outstanding job to identify and recommend improvements throughout the region. The comprehensive plans of several larger cities have identified open space, greenway, and sidewalk development initiatives which can be connected in some form or fashion to adjacent communities.



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At this time, Alexander County is just beginning their comprehensive planning effort and their input of conceptual and proposed ideas were included. However other planning documents from the county included the Dusty Ridge Park Plan with its recreation and water access plans and the Rocky Face Master Plan examining the development potential of Rocky Face as a rock climbing school and nature reserve. The sidewalk plan by the Town of Taylorsville also shows urban pedestrian links that will be integrated into the regional trail approach.

Burke County and the City of Morganton have been very proactive in the planning process over the past several years and have recognized the importance of protecting the region's natural resources. The area in and around Lake James has seen many plans developed to ensure the long-term protection and public access for the lake and surrounding environment, including the Phase II Small Area Plan, State Park Master Plan, and Trails Implementation Plan. Another area site specific document by the county includes the South Mountain State Park Master Plan in the southern part of the county examining the development at the park. County-wide plans such as the Heritage Plan (as a part of the Blue Ridge Heritage Area project), the Comprehensive Parks and Recreation Master Plan, and 2002 Blueprint Strategic Plan provide insight on how and where the necessary recreation and tourism possibilities lie and relate to the county as a whole.

The City of Morganton Recreation Master Plan provides the overall look at the city's recreation and open space needs and requirements. Site specific plans are more detailed in related particular information in park development which includes the Catawba Meadows Sports Complex and the Greenway Master Plan. The recommendations contained within these two area plans are in the process of being implemented and updated. More than five miles of the Catawba River Greenway has been built along with the first phase of the sports complex. The Catawba Meadows Sports Complex plan is presently being updated and includes a phasing plan and several recreational amenities in conjunction with the baseball/softball fields and training facilities.

Caldwell County too has been proactive in managing and planning for its natural and cultural resources. The Collettsville Community and Yadkin Valley Community plans are area plans highlighting the natural and cultural assets which came about out the overall county Comprehensive Plan. These two plans in particular address the more rural northern sections of the county which are facing an increased pace of residential development. These areas also contain the more significant natural resources as well; the Pisgah National Forest (including Wilson Creek Gorge and the Johns River) and the Buffalo Gamelands (above the Yadkin River).

Prepared by a non-profit group, the Caldwell Pathways Master Plan serves to educate and guide the development of trails, greenways, and bikeways throughout the county. It offers avenues to link, not only physically the many pathways, but also the public and local government officials in the need and opportunities for future trails. Another significant plan within Caldwell County is the Wilson Creek Corridor Plan. This is a detailed plan focusing directly on the unique character of the Wilson Creek area.



Hiddenite Center



Catawba River Greenway



Yadkin River



CHAPTER 2 – OVERVIEW OF PREVIOUS PLANNING INITIATIVES AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Throughout the corridor, the plan recommends site specific improvements, such as trails and facilities along with land acquisitions for future generations to enjoy.

The City of Lenoir historically has been very recreation minded as evident by such facilities as the Aquatic/Fitness Center, Broyhill Walking Park and the recent development of the Lower Creek Greenway. The city is in the process of developing its new comprehensive plan of which a portion will address the continuation of recreation facilities and future needs/opportunities. The town of Granite Falls too has developed a Recreation Master Plan which has given direction to expanding their numerous facilities, including the recently opened Lakeside Park.

Catawba County is in the process of completing its comprehensive recreation plan during the period of this study, but has completed several small area plans and the development of two major recreation facilities, Bakers Mountain, and Riverbend parks. These two parks offer public amenities difficult to find in an urbanizing county. The small area plans included a focus on natural resource and open space opportunities and recommendations. Three private non-profit groups within the county, the Foothills Land Conservancy (Strategic Lands Study), Catawba Valley Paddle Trails Association (Henry Fork and Jacobs Fork Paddle Trail) and the Catawba County Historical Association (Murray's Mill and Bunker Hill Bridge), provided plans for improvements and land acquisition projects that were used extensively to determine the public interest in certain projects.

The City of Hickory comprehensive plan, Hickory By Choice, builds a foundation for the continued development of their recreational needs. A more in-depth analysis comes from the Parks and Recreation Master Plan which specifically considers those needs and the potential opportunities in the future. The city has several recreation sites and recently constructed Henry Fork River Regional Recreation Park and Stanford Park are examples of its continued support for recreation. One particular site which is presently undeveloped is Cloninger Mill Site; a 75-acre tract in northern part of town that abuts Lake Hickory has significant development potential as multi-use destination.

Other municipalities in the county, including Newton, Conover, and Maiden have completed comprehensive plans and have begun to implement greenway programs within their towns. These three towns are connected by US321B and could potentially link through a trails program through coordinated efforts. Newton has also completed two area plans, Saint Paul's and Eastside, and a Recreation Master Plan to study their overall needs. The city of Conover's proposed Lyle Creek Greenway can link with Hickory and then eastward to Claremont and Catawba.



Lenoir Greenway



Bakers Mountain Visitor Center



Highland Recreation Center at Stanford Park



Cloninger Mill property

3.1 Market Context

3.1.1 Demographic and Economic Base

This chapter compares core demographic trends in the Hickory-Morganton-Lenoir elect jurisdictions. Categories including population, age, income, employment and retail are analyzed to present a preliminary assessment of economic performance and market growth.

3.1.2 Population

Table 2 shows population growth in highlighted jurisdiction from 1990 to 2004. Notice that the Hickory-Morgantown-Lenoir MSA (referred to as the Hickory MSA) has grown at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) larger than North Carolina and the nation. Only Charlotte grew at a faster rate.

Table 2: Population, 1990 to 2004

Jurisdiction	1990	2000	2004	CAGR
USA	248,709,873	281,421,906	285,691,501	1.00%
North Carolina	6,628,637	8,049,313	8,270,028	1.59%
Hickory MSA	249,244	341,851	345,590	2.36%
Charlotte	395,934	540,828	582,502	2.80%

Source: US Census

Table 3 shows the change in the distribution of age for the Hickory MSA. The largest decreases occurred among those aged 15 to 19 and 25 to 34. The largest increase occurred in the 45 to 54 year old age cohort.

Table 3: Hickory MSA Population by Age

Age Cohort	1990	2000	2004	Change
Under 5 Years	6%	6%	7%	1%
5 to 9 Years	6%	7%	6%	0%
10 to 14 Years	7%	7%	8%	1%
15 to 19 Years	8%	6%	5%	-3%
20 to 24 Years	7%	6%	5%	-2%
25 to 34 Years	17%	15%	14%	-3%
35 to 44 Years	16%	16%	15%	-1%
45 to 54 Years	12%	14%	15%	3%
55 to 59 Years	5%	6%	6%	1%
60 to 64 Years	5%	5%	5%	0%
65 to 74 Years	7%	7%	8%	1%
75 to 84 Years	4%	4%	4%	0%
85+ Years	1%	1%	1%	0%

Source: US Census

Table 4 shows the change in median age for highlighted jurisdictions. Table 4 shows that, for the Hickory MSA, median age increased at a rate well above the state and nation. As well, the current rate of 37.8 years is above noted benchmarks.

Table 4: Median Age

Jurisdiction	2000	2004	CAGR
USA	35.3	36.2	0.63%
North Carolina	35.3	36.0	0.49%
Hickory MSA	36.7	37.8	0.74%
Charlotte	32.7	34.2	1.13%

Source: US Census

3.1.3 Income

Table 5 shows growth in per capita personal income. According to the Bureau of Economic Analysis, personal income is equal to the sum of wage and salary disbursements, other labor income, proprietors income with inventory valuation and capital consumption adjustments, rental income of persons with capital consumption adjustment, personal dividend income, personal interest income, and transfer payments to persons, less personal contributions for social insurance. Per capita personal income is



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personal income divided by the population of the specified area. The Hickory MSA per capita personal income has grown slower than the per capita personal income of the state or nation. In 2003, it was roughly \$2,500 less than the state and over \$6,000 less than the nation. Overall compound rates of growth for Hickory area also below US and state averages.

Table 5: Per Capital Personal Income

Jurisdiction	1990	2000	2004	CAGR
USA	\$19,477	\$29,845	\$31,484	3.8%
North Carolina	\$17,246	\$27,068	\$27,859	3.8%
Hickory MSA	\$16,689	\$25,174	\$25,220	3.2%

Source: Bureau of Economic Analysis

3.1.4 Employment

Table 6 compares employment change in all non-farming industries with employment change in manufacturing. Note that the Hickory MSA shows the largest decline in both categories. Most importantly, the decline in the Hickory MSA manufacturing industry between 2000 and 2005 is more than twice as high as the national decline and more than two percentage points higher than the statewide rate of decline.

Table 6: Employment Change

Jurisdiction	Type	2000	2005	CAGR
USA	Total Non-Farm	131,785,000	133,463,000	0.25%
	Manufacturing	17,263,000	14,232,000	-3.79%
	Mfg. % of Total	13%	11%	-4.03%
North Carolina	Total Non-Farm	3,933,700	3,912,400	-0.11%
	Manufacturing	757,900	566,600	-5.65%
	Mfg. % of Total	19%	14%	-5.55%
Hickory MSA	Total Non-Farm	187,000	162,800	-2.73%
	Manufacturing	79,200	53,700	-7.48%
	Mfg. % of Total	42%	33%	-4.88%

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics

3.1.5 Educational Attainment

Table 7 shows the educational attainment for the Hickory MSA nation overall in 2004. Notice that the MSA shows a higher percentage of those without a high school diploma and significantly lower percentages for those with bachelor or graduate degrees.

Table 7: Educational Attainment (25% Years, 2004)

Level	Hickory MSA	USA
Less than 9th Grade	9%	6%
9th to 12th Grade, No Diploma	18%	10%
High School (Includes Equivalency)	31%	30%
Some College, No Degree	19%	20%
Associate Degree	7%	7%
Bachelor's Degree	10%	17%
Graduate or Professional Degree	6%	10%

Source: US Census

3.1.6 Retail Sales Analysis

The team evaluated retail pulls factors for the Hickory and Charlotte MSA's based on data from the North Carolina Department of Revenue. The intent of the analysis is to highlight two concepts:

1. Broader economic comparisons between the Hickory area and other regions
2. Emphasis on the significance of visitor spending to a community in generating sales taxes, with the added benefit of reduced demand for public services.

Pull factors are ratios that compare local and state retail sales on a per capita basis, adjusting for differences in income. The resulting ratio is helpful in understanding retail competitiveness, since demand for retail is closely linked with income and population growth. A pull factor of less than 1.0



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shows that an MSA is losing retail sales to adjacent areas. Pull factors equal to 1.0 would indicate that MSA potential retail spending balances with actual retail store sales. Pull factors greater than 1.0 show that an MSA is an importer of retail sales, above what the resident market would support.

Table 8 exhibits total retail pull factors for the Charlotte and Hickory metro areas. Automotive sales are excluded from this analysis. Not surprisingly, it is a net importer of retail sales. The Hickory MSA, on the other hand, is losing retail sales to adjacent areas, with a pull factor that has ranged between 0.75 and 0.73.

Table 8: Retail Pull Factory Comparison

Jurisdiction	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
Charlotte MSA	2.00	2.10	2.05	2.07	2.00
Hickory MSA	0.75	0.72	0.68	0.72	0.73

Sources: US Census, BEA, North Carolina Department of Revenue, and ERA

Table 9 shows retail sales by category for the Hickory MSA and North Carolina. Note that for every category besides “General Merchandise” statewide retail sales have increased at a greater rate than MSA retail sales.

Table 9: Retail Sales by Category (In Thousands)

Category	Jurisdiction	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	CAGR
Apparel	Hickory MSA	69,361.7	66,972.0	70,145.5	78,994.0	75,073.0	0.0%
	North Carolina	2,817,863.4	2,787,520.4	2,846,629.3	3,169,392.2	3,622,109.7	0.5%
Food	Hickory MSA	916,751.7	880,423.9	899,524.5	972,206.5	1,064,799.4	0.8%
	North Carolina	23,428,968.0	22,738,449.4	23,947,581.6	25,767,200.0	27,537,880.7	0.1%
Furniture	Hickory MSA	291,540.1	274,384.1	281,978.5	306,968.6	297,506.3	0.5%
	North Carolina	4,978,368.6	4,650,440.5	4,725,403.0	5,030,490.1	5,528,144.0	0.7%
General Merchandise	Hickory MSA	968,594.4	959,276.7	978,544.5	1,065,068.8	1,213,488.9	0.8%
	North Carolina	29,194,107.5	28,570,546.3	29,741,143.1	32,223,307.9	36,237,522.5	0.6%
Lumber and Building Material	Hickory MSA	366,342.5	344,725.2	352,347.1	377,207.5	437,552.3	0.5%
	North Carolina	12,384,270.0	11,749,881.7	11,975,739.8	13,775,836.0	16,234,362.7	0.0%

Sources: North Carolina Department of Revenue and ERA

3.1.7 National Retail Context

The analysis notes several key national retail industry trends that are particularly relevant to the local situation, in terms of local economic activity, as well as linkage to visitor spending.

- Continued growth of larger format recreational outfitters, such as Cabella’s, Bass Pro Shops, and to a lesser extent, Gander Mountain. These larger format stores are seen as key elements of tourist market development, in that they tend to pull customers from significantly larger trade areas (40 to 80 miles), pulling additional dollars into a host community that would otherwise go elsewhere.
- The Internet continues to absorb market share from traditional retail formats. Between 1992 and 2005 Internet retailing increased from 2.4 to 5.7 percent of total retail sales, representing growth from about \$35 billion in 1992 to more than \$160 billion in 2004. While the allocation of retail sales to the Internet is of little concern to national retailers, the same cannot be said for communities that support retail space, and see sales dollars and taxes flow elsewhere.
- Since 1992, while overall retail sales have increased at about 4 percent per year, retail sales generated by warehouse clubs and superstores has grown by about 14 percent per year, greater than rates of growth for internet shopping, which have increased at about 11 percent per year, again since 1992. Wal-Mart, Target, and Kohl’s have been driving the superstore trend.
- Recent and current energy cost increases for oil, natural gas, and gasoline tend to have the strongest impact on low to middle income residents, diverting a share of potential retail spending into energy. While historic spikes in energy prices have been short-lived, changing national and international economic conditions would tend to point to a future with higher energy prices.



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- Traditional grocery stores and department stores have increasingly been on the short end of the stick, losing market share to warehouse clubs. Over the noted period, the grocery store share of total per capita retail sales decreased from 25 to 18 percent of total sales. For department stores, the decrease was from 13 percent down to 8 percent of total per capita retail sales.
- Retailers in general are also reacting to changing spending patterns driven by new technologies related to broadband access and cell phones, which have in the past 2 to 3 years had a relevant impact on personal spending choices. ERA notes the emergence of things such as TiVo, XM Satellite Radio, iTunes, and Netflix, which are beginning to significantly impact disposable income choices. The specific impact of broadband access, combined with service such as Netflix, is expected to have a significant impact on the profitability of traditional Video rental stores, a standard anchor of many neighborhood retail centers.
- Nationally, shopping center owners are awaiting the expected fallout from the recent May/Federated department store merger, which is expected to result in a number of traditional department store anchors going vacant. The recent national roll-out of Macy's also reflects the departure of 10 regional brands, including Filene's, Foley's, Hecht's, Strawbridge's, Kaufmann's, Famous-Barr, L.S. Ayres, the Jones Store, Meier & Frank, Robinsons-May, and Marshall Fields.
- The recent Sears/Kmart merger has raised questions about the future of these two brands.
- Retailers are also responding to shifting tastes, with one result being the emergence of a new retail shopping center category, called the lifestyle center. This product lacks the traditional department store anchors found in most malls, and instead focuses on a mix of restaurants, entertainment, and other destination oriented retail to draw shoppers. Related to above is the general growth of emphasis on lifestyle/entertainment oriented retail development, linked with the related re-emergence of downtown markets as focal points for this kind of retail activity.

Table 10 summarizes several notable shifts in per capita retail spending between 1992 and 2005, showing the retail segments that have kept pace with overall growth in retail sales, and the segments that have lagged behind. Table 10 highlights the nature of key shifts in retailing away from traditional grocery stores, clothing stores, and conventional department stores, and toward superstore, bookstore, and Internet shopping outlets.

Table 10: National Per Capita Retail Spending Shifts

Retail Segment	1992	2005	Annual Growth	1992 Share	2005 Share	Change
Furniture and Home Furnishings Stores	\$206	\$375	4.74%	3.6%	3.9%	0.3%
Electronics and Appliance Stores	\$168	\$339	5.56%	3.0%	3.5%	0.6%
Building Mat. and Garden Equip. and Supplies	\$515	\$1,103	6.04%	9.1%	11.5%	2.5%
Food and Beverage Stores	\$1,457	\$1,752	1.43%	25.7%	18.3%	-7.4%
Health and Personal Care Stores	\$352	\$703	5.46%	6.2%	7.4%	1.1%
Clothing and Clothing Accessories Stores	\$472	\$680	2.86%	8.3%	7.1%	-1.2%
Sporting Goods, Hobby, Book, and Music Stores	\$193	\$276	2.78%	3.4%	2.9%	-0.5%
General Merchandise Stores	\$972	\$1,774	4.73%	17.2%	18.6%	1.4%
Department Stores	\$711	\$743	0.34%	12.6%	7.8%	-4.8%
Discount Department Stores	\$360	\$441	1.56%	6.4%	4.6%	1.8%
Other General Merchandise Stores	\$278	\$1,049	10.76%	4.9%	11.0%	6.1%
Warehouse Clubs and Superstores	\$157	\$914	14.51%	2.8%	9.6%	6.8%
Miscellaneous Store Retailers	\$219	\$374	4.22%	3.9%	3.9%	0.1%
Electronic Shopping and Mail-Order Houses	\$138	\$545	11.13%	2.4%	5.7%	3.3%
Food Services and Drinking Places	\$798	\$1,338	4.06%	14.1%	14.0%	-0.1%
Total Retail Sales	\$5,659	\$9,555	4.11%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%

Source: US Census

3.1.8 Tourist Spending Trends

Tables 11 and 12 highlight total growth in tourism related revenue by county between 1990 and 2000. Table 11 shows how tourist spending remains heavily concentrated in Catawba County, which is generally consistent with other information noted in this discussion.



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Table 11: Tourism Revenue Growth (In Millions)

County	1990	2000	2004	CAGR
Alexander	\$10.99	\$13.42	\$14.07	1.78%
Burke	\$32.72	\$57.92	\$62.39	4.72%
Caldwell	\$25.07	\$41.88	\$38.21	3.06%
Catawba	\$102.86	\$184.22	\$178.78	4.03%
Hickory MSA	\$171.64	\$297.44	\$293.45	3.91%

Source: NC Department of Commerce

Table 12 below highlights a more relevant analysis of tourist revenue per capita, comparing the Hickory MSA to North Carolina as a whole. Table 12 shows that overall spending growth per capita has been well below state-wide levels, both in absolute and percentage growth terms. Given the potential strength of the area as a tourist destination, the current levels are notable.

Table 12: Tourism Revenue Per Capita

Jurisdiction	1990	2000	2004	CAGR
Hickory MSA	\$774.20	\$870.09	\$849.13	0.66%
North Carolina	\$1,018.13	\$1,538.72	\$1,602.47	3.29%

Source: NC Department of Commerce

The analysis highlights the point that an expanded tourist program has logical potential to boost retail spending and sales taxes.

3.1.9 Demographic Implications

The above analysis highlights trends that have been echoed by others across the Hickory Region (WPCOG). The Hickory Metro area is in the midst of a considerable economic transition that is entirely consistent with national trends, i.e., a transition away from mass manufacturing to services and more specialized manufacturing. That this transition is still underway is significant, bringing with it the reality of continued job losses in traditional (well-paying) manufacturing sectors, offset by new positions in (lower-paying) service industries. The extent of the transition reinforces the need to have the region develop new job opportunities, of which one logically should relate to expanded recreational development.

- Proximity to the regional centers of Charlotte and Asheville.
- A growing Four-County Market of about 345,000 people, with growth concentrated in older age segments.
- A regional economic base in the midst of a long-term transition away from traditional manufacturing.
- An uneven distribution of economic strength and strain across the four counties.
- Tourist market penetration below state average.
- A retail market concentrated in Hickory that largely serves the 4-county market.

3.2 Identity Context

The Catawba Valley region has been known for the best part of the twentieth century as a center for furniture manufacturing and supporting industries. Textiles too were a mainstay industry with sock/hosiery manufacturing and upholstery supplying fabrics to the furniture industries. In the 1980s, the cable/fiber optic industry became a prominent player in the region. Through these industries, the region enjoyed growth and prosperity. However with the recent decline of these traditional manufacturing based industries in the late 1990s and early 2000s, the region has suffered jobs losses and an economic downturn.

The region was blessed with significant natural and cultural resources. Although not always in the forefront of economic development and marketing efforts, it is one of the primary assets that contribute to the region's perceived high QOL. The proximity of region centrally located between the metropolitan areas of Asheville, Winston-Salem and Charlotte adds to the QOL and the number of potential visitors taking advantage of those natural resources.



3.3 Recreation and Linkages

3.3.1 Introduction

The recreational strengths and opportunities of the region are well documented in many of the plans reviewed for the study; they identify a rich tapestry of recreational activities and attractions from throughout the area that include natural and man-made sites or locations. Accordingly—each site provides a unique opportunity to recreate physically, culturally and spiritually. The diversity of the offerings range from large wilderness areas with very little or limited influence of the built environment—to urban entertainment and cultural sites designed for a specific purpose or activity. Regardless of their function each site or activity has added value to the QOL provided to residents and visitors of the study area.

Strong community support exists for greenways and pedestrian corridors that are frequently used for recreation, physical fitness, and transportation. A framework for a greenway system already exists with a network of open streams throughout the region based on the Catawba River Trail and local efforts for implementing sidewalk, bikeway, and greenway plans.

3.3.2 Current Conditions and Potential – Regional Service Context

The following information is intended to describe the current condition of how each County provides recreational activities and services within the region. Service descriptions identify not only how recreational opportunities are currently provided but also indicate prospective future pursuits for investigation during the planning process.

3.3.2.1 Alexander County

- Alexander County currently provides “local level” recreation services through individual park sites and schools. Public providers include Alexander County and Taylorsville and most sites concentrate on serving local communities with space for active play such as sports fields and play grounds. Other opportunities such as picnic facilities, walking trail access, and boating access are provided in the County along the Catawba River. Most of these facilities serve local users.
- Adding and improving facilities at existing park sites is proposed—this should improve amenities and service for local residents. Some facilities may possibly be improved to provide service on a Regional Level (see below).
- Opportunities to provide facilities that offer recreation on a Regional Level or at least connect with regional level services include the following:
 - Trail development (paddle, pedal, and pedestrian) that ties into the water access points along the Catawba such as Dusty Ridge Access, Wittenberg Access.
 - Development of swimming access point, proposed near the Wittenberg site
 - Developing Rocky Face as a destination park for specific outdoor experiences such as trails and rock climbing
 - A YMCA is proposed in the Taylorsville area that could be a factor within the region depending on what facilities are actually constructed. (indoor and outdoor recreation facilities are proposed)
 - Timing festivals and events to coincide with other attractions in the region



Wittenberg Access on Lake Hickory

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3.3.2.2 Burke County

- Burke County is blessed with access to natural and manmade amenities that provide recreation opportunities on a national, regional, and local level. Access to sites in the area is easily attained via I-40, major state highways and roads, the Blue Ridge Parkway and future passenger rail service.
- **Morganton Area Active Recreation Hub**—Recent park improvements in the Morganton vicinity have provided the area with “Regional Draw” sports facilities capable of being promoted throughout the southeast. Facilities include Catawba Meadows Park, Catawba Soccer Complex Shuey Park, and East Burke Park. These sites and those proposed at other County and Regional locations should continue to attract participants from throughout the region for tournaments and special events. Additionally, many parks within the County are within close proximity of the Catawba River. The river corridor links the entire region and can potentially be used to connect facilities using various types of trails whether on water or by land.
- The County has an abundance of historical and cultural sites that offer venues or events of varying scale. The venues are of good quality and should continue to attract heritage tourism if properly promoted (festivals, museums, galleries, community theatres music venues meeting facilities etc.).
- **Natural Amenities**—The Catawba River, Lake James, Pisgah National Forest, Linville River Gorge, Linville Falls and South Mountain State Park are sites located in the County that offer natural attractions that draw participants on a regional and national level. Many of these holdings will be further enhanced by implementing proposed land conservation and preservation strategies identified by the many studies prepared for the area—such as the County Land Use Plan, National Heritage Area Planning Studies, State Park Improvement Plans, Catawba – Wateree Comprehensive Relicensing Agreement etc. These strategies increase the likelihood of promoting local attractions as tourism destinations with significant economic impact.



Western Rim of the Linville Gorge

3.3.2.3 Caldwell County

- Caldwell County also is blessed with ample access to natural and manmade amenities that provide recreation opportunities on a national, regional, and local level. Access to sites in the area is not as easily attained from interstate highways as those in Burke County but major state and US routes/highways provide relatively quick access.
- The county has an abundance of historical and cultural sites that offer venues or events of varying scale. A larger portion of them are provided in the Town of Lenoir the most populated urban center of the county. The venues provided are of good quality and should continue to attract heritage tourism if properly promoted. (festivals, music venues/theatres, museums, galleries, meeting facilities etc).
- The municipalities of Lenoir, Hudson, and Granite Falls offer traditional park and recreation services at a variety of indoor and outdoor locations. Most of the facility offerings are geared toward local users however there are some facilities such as the Broyhill Civic Center and Park that attract users from throughout the region.



Wilson Creek

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- The county has an abundance of historical and cultural sites that offer venues or events of varying scale. Venues such as the Broyhill Center, Caldwell Arts, Fort Defiance, Patterson School, and the Arts Council Gallery are of good quality and the area should continue to attract heritage and cultural tourism if properly promoted (festivals, museums, galleries, community theatres music venues meeting facilities etc.).
- **Natural Amenities**—Wilson Creek, Catawba River (Lake Rhodhiss—Lake Hickory) , Pisgah National Forest, Johns River and Tuttle Educational State Forest are sites located in the County that offer natural attractions that draw participants on a regional and national level. Many of these holdings will be further enhanced by implementing proposed conservation and preservation strategies identified by the many studies prepared for the area—such as National Heritage Area Planning Studies, community vision and land use plans developed by the County, and the Duke Power-FERC Re-licensing Plan etc. These strategies and in-place plans increase the likelihood of promoting local project and attractions as QOL improvements and tourism destinations that may have significant economic impact.

3.3.2.4 Catawba County

- Surrounded by three lakes, Catawba County is home to the largest urban center within the area—Hickory, a city of approximately 39,000, offers numerous recreational and cultural activities.
- The City of Hickory provides recreation services on a local level and regional level at sites throughout the City. Recreation programs offered by Hickory include athletics, fitness, arts, camps, and senior activities etc. Most facility offerings are geared toward local users however some attractions such as the L.P. Frans Stadium (Crawdads minor league baseball), Hickory Museum of Art (HMA), Science Center, Hickory Metro Convention Center, and Henry Fork River Regional Recreation Park attract participants on a regional basis.
- The county offers outdoor recreation at two parks; Bakers Mountain and Riverbend parks both sites are used by visitors through the region.
- Visitors are attracted to the Region for valued pricing on furniture and textiles available at the furniture and textile outlets. These industries are still vital to the local economy even though many local manufactures have reduced production or closed facilities. A change in the marketplace for these industries has created a trend of manufacturing “high-end” products that attract more lucrative clientele.
- The county is rich in history with Bunker Hill Covered Bridge and Murray’s Mill being two primary historical sites which cater to locals, tourists, and schoolchildren.



Catawba River

3.3.2.5 Regional Recreation Opportunities

Potential regional level recreation opportunities exist to uniformly promote assets in the area and physically connect the region. They are summarized as follows:

- Continue development of trail master plans (paddle, pedal, and pedestrian) that tie local communities to the Catawba River to link the entire region.
- Continued development of individual facility master plans to attract Regional Sports programs, tournaments, events etc.
- Connect to outdoor experience facilities proposed within the area at natural attractions (State, National, private enterprise).

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- Time/schedule festivals and events to coincide with other attractions in the region and potential to create new ones.

3.3.3 Regional Connection and Tie-Ins

As mentioned previously in this plan, there have been many planning initiatives and facility master plans prepared within the region. Many of these plans offer opportunities for “tie-ins” or linkages for physically connecting locations for promoting and achieving common goals and objectives. Exploiting and promoting the commonalities of these plans provides a strong base or framework for implementing a comprehensive approach to providing events and attractions that improve the QOL for residents and attract users from throughout the United States.

The following list of initiatives, plans and projects within the region should be reviewed for commonality with the final proposal of this study and when possible implemented.

- Choice 2020 Strategic Open Space Framework (*started as Vision Choice 2020 Open Space Framework*)
- Catawba Regional Trail Plan
- “Land For Tomorrow” State Initiative
- Blue Ridge National Heritage Area
- Caldwell Pathways Greenway Master Plan
- Hickory Parks and Recreation Master Plan
- Hickory Bikeway and Greenway Plan
- Morganton Greenway Plan (Catawba River Greenway Plan)
- Catawba Meadows Facility Master Plan
- Rocky Face Park Master Plan
- Lake James Phase II Plan

It is encouraging to note that many of the physical links needed to connect inside the region are in their early stages of implementation. They include paddle trails, urban greenways, bikeways, regional transportation strategies, and collaborative use of facilities for events. Most of the plans or initiatives noted above have incorporated these links as amenities within their plan.

Connecting with initiatives and linkages outside the immediate planning region will also provide expanded opportunities for promoting the area and develop connections with other communities. The most common links to other regions identified during the planning process includes the following:

- **Yadkin Valley Wines**—Connect physically through a trail network and promote tours.
- **Blowing Rock and Boone**—Connect to the growing vacation and retirement industry.
- **Asheville and Buncombe County**—Connect with regional tourist attractions to market similar users.
- **Charlotte Metropolitan Region**—The Catawba River is a natural link to the Charlotte region and a new White Water River Center is a possibly venue that can assist in promoting natural sites within the planning region to create linkages.
- **Blue Ridge Parkway**—Connect physically via trail networks and promote tours at visitor sites along the route.
- **Mountains-to-Sea Trail**—This trail provides opportunities for the region to connect with resources throughout the state.
- **Passenger Rail Service**—Proposed high speed rail service with stops at Morganton and Hickory to provide an opportunity for expanded promotion of the region to other large metro centers in the state.



Lake Hickory



3.4 Environmental

3.4.1 Introduction

This section provides an overview of important natural features and water quality in the region. The four-county region is rich in natural resources. The physiography of the region is primarily formed by erosive powers of the Catawba River, Yadkin River and their tributaries. Gently rolling landscape in the eastern portion of the region contrasts with the rugged mountainous terrain to the west. Historically, the population in this region has been relatively low which resulted in de facto conservation of natural features, landscapes and good water quality. However, over time the landscape and natural features of the region have also been affected by development and agricultural activities. The rate of population growth in recent years has increased, which could lead to continued degradation of natural resources (both terrestrial and aquatic) and a loss of the character and amenities that has attracted people to this region in the first place.

Although growth has affected natural communities and water quality, there are still many examples of outstanding natural features, excellent water quality, and outdoor amenities located throughout the region. The North Carolina Natural Heritage Program has been active in identifying the many significant natural areas throughout the state and there are many significant sites in these four counties. These sites range from aquatic habitat in high quality waterways to large areas, or macrosites that encompass multiple significant natural areas.

The most notable and well known of these sites are probably Linville Gorge in Burke County and Wilson Creek in Caldwell County. The Linville Gorge Macrosite includes multiple natural heritage areas and encompasses the Linville Gorge National Wilderness, Linville Gorge Falls, and aquatic habitat in the Linville River. Linville River has been designated as a North Carolina Natural and Scenic River. Wilson Creek has also been designated as a National Wild and Scenic River. Significant natural areas that are listed by the Natural Heritage Program are presented in Table 13.

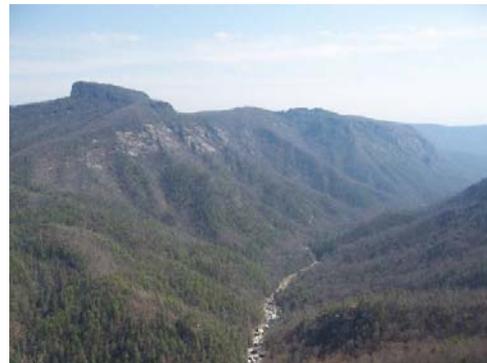


Table Rock and Linville Gorge

3.4.2 Water Quality in Regional Watersheds

As noted above, much of the regional physiography has been significantly affected by erosion by creeks and rivers that make up the watershed of the Catawba River and the Yadkin River. The two rivers form portions of separate and larger watersheds. Catawba River watershed drains portions of all four counties in the region, while the Yadkin River watershed only drains portions of Alexander and Caldwell Counties.

3.4.2.1 Yadkin River

The Yadkin River and its tributaries in Caldwell and Alexander Counties form a portion of the headwaters of the Yadkin-Pee Dee River Basin. The entire river basin extends from northwest North Carolina and southern Virginia and eventually empties into the Atlantic Ocean in the vicinity of Myrtle Beach, South Carolina. The total land area within the Yadkin-Pee Dee watershed is 7,221 square miles, however the Yadkin River and only drains 32 percent of land in Alexander County and 25 percent of the land area of Caldwell County. The Yadkin River merges with the Uwharrie River to form the Pee Dee River.

3.4.2.1.1 Water Quality

The State of North Carolina's Division of Water Quality manages the water quality program and published Basinwide Assessment Reports and Basinwide Water Quality Planning Reports. The Yadkin River Basin Basinwide Assessment Report was published in June 2002 and the Basinwide Water

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Table 13: North Carolina Natural Heritage Program—Significant Natural Areas

Alexander County	
Bald Rock Mountain	Joe/Little Joes Mountains
Brushy Mountain Macrosite	Little Mountain
Brushy Mountain/Vannoy Ridge	Prickly-Pear Mountain
Buzzard Dome	Rocky Face Mountain
Catawba River Corridor	Sugarloaf Mountain
Chestnut Mountain	
Burke County	
Brindletown Forests	Johns River/Mulberry Creek Aquatic Habitat
Broughton Hospital/Keller Knob	Jonas Ridge Bog
Brown Mountain Greenstone Forests	Linville Falls
Burkemont Mountain	Linville Gorge
Camp Creek Bluff	Linville Gorge Macrosite
Camp Creek North	Linville River Aquatic Habitat
Clear Creek Watershed Natural Area	Shoal Creek Watershed
Cranberry Knob Bogs and Swamp Forest	Simms Hill—Little River Uplands
Deaf School Watershed	Smith Cliff/Henry Fork River
Duggers Creek Forests	Smith Mountain
Foothills Megasite	South Mountains Henry Fork Watershed
Hall Knob	South Mountains Jacobs Fork Watershed
Hildebran Mountain	South Mountains Macrosite
Hildebran/Henry River Slopes	Upper Creek Aquatic Habitat
Island Creek Heath Bluff	Upper Creek Falls Forest
Jacob Fork (South Fork Catawba) Aquatic Habitat	Vulcan-Rhodhiss Slopes
Jimmy Knob	Yellow Mountain/Ironmonger Mountain
Caldwell County	
Blowing Rock Cliffs	Wilson Creek
Grandfather Mountain	Wilson Creek Slopes
Johns River/Mulberry Creek Aquatic Habitat	
Catawba County	
Baker Mountain	Lake Norman Slopes and Shoreline
Catawba River Corridor	Lyle Creek Corridor
Henry Fork River Slopes	Lyle Creek Wetland
Jacob Fork Aquatic Habitat	Murray's Mill Lake and Upper Balls Creek
Jacob Fork East Corridor	Terrapin Creek Corridor
Jacob Fork West Corridor	

Sources: Alexander County—North Carolina Natural Heritage Program Website, 2006
 Burke County—North Carolina Natural Heritage Program Inventory Report, 2002
 Catawba County—North Carolina Natural Heritage Program Inventory Report, 2002
 Caldwell County—North Carolina Natural Heritage Program Website, 2006

Quality Planning Report was published in March 2003. These reports describe water quality conditions that support biological communities. The analysis is presented for each subbasin of the overall watershed. The Yadkin River in Alexander County is within the Yadkin-Pee Dee River Subbasin 01. The South Yadkin River in Caldwell County is within the Yadkin-Pee Dee River Subbasin 06.

Water quality in the Yadkin-Pee Dee River basin varies significantly from headwaters to the Atlantic shoreline. Water quality is affected by many factors including normal erosion and agricultural activities, but is more acutely affected by storm water runoff from urban areas. These non-point sources of pollution are primarily the result from urban growth. Since the Yadkin River flows through less developed portions of the counties in this report the water quality is good to excellent. As expected, water quality degrades in certain locations as the river system flows through more urbanized areas of North Carolina.



Yadkin River

Water quality (bioclassifications) of the Yadkin River in Alexander County (a portion of the 01 subbasin) has been rated as good/fair. Over the past 20 years the river water quality has slightly improved, however in the last monitoring cycle there has been some indications of some water quality degradation. The Basinwide Assessment Report that one potential reason for the water quality degradation is increased nutrients in the water. Buffalo Creek, a tributary of the Yadkin River, has been rated as Excellent water quality in the past two monitoring cycles. The South Yadkin monitoring location was rated Excellent in 1996, but monitoring in 2001 revised the water quality rating to Good/Fair. The South Yadkin River watershed in Alexander County has been designated as WS-II and WS-IV. According to the NC Division of Water Quality, areas with WS-II designation are by



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definition High Quality Waters (HQW). However, at the time the Basinwide Water Quality Plan was published there had been no request for this classification.

3.4.2.2 Catawba River

The Catawba River is the upper reaches of the Santee-Cooper River basin that flows through North Carolina, South Carolina and the empties into the Atlantic Ocean. The total size of the watershed is 3,285 square miles. The entire watershed from headwaters to Atlantic shoreline is less than half the size of the Yadkin-Pee Dee river basin. The Catawba River and its tributaries drain most of the four county region. The Catawba River drains all of Burke County, all of Catawba County, 68 percent of Alexander County and 75 percent of Caldwell County.



Catawba River

3.4.2.2.1 Water Quality

The State of North Carolina's Division of Water Quality manages the water quality program and published Basinwide Assessment Reports and Basinwide Water Quality Planning Reports. The Catawba River Basin Basinwide Assessment Report was published in June 2003 and the Basinwide Water Quality Planning Report was published in September 2004. These reports describe water quality conditions that support biological communities. The analysis is presented for each subbasin of the overall watershed. The Catawba River in Alexander County is within river Subbasin 32. The Catawba River in Caldwell County is within Subbasins 31 and 32. The Catawba River in Burke County is within Subbasins 30, 31, and 35. The Catawba River in Catawba County is within Subbasins 32, a small portion of 33 and 35.

As with the Yadkin-Pee Dee watershed, water quality varies significantly from headwaters to the Atlantic shoreline. The factors affecting water quality in this river basin are generally the same as the Yadkin-Pee Dee River Basin. Non-point sources are a growing concern throughout the river basin. These non-point sources of pollution are typically the result of urban growth. Since the Catawba River flows through more developed portions of the counties in this report the water quality has a wider range of classifications than the Yadkin River. The most significant difference between the Yadkin River and Catawba River within the study area is that a large portion of the Catawba River is impounded, whereas the Yadkin is free-flowing within the study area.

The first impoundment in the river basin is Lake James. This lake was formed by the impoundment of the Catawba River, North Fork Catawba River and the Linville River. Its main purpose is generating electricity and its secondary use is for recreation. The 2003 Basinwide Assessment Report states that the lake is meeting all designated uses. Lake Rhodhiss is the second impoundment within the study area and is used as a water supply, electricity generation and recreation. The 2003 Basinwide Assessment Report states that Lake Rhodhiss has been negatively affected by point and non-point pollution.



Lake James

Lake Hickory has been affected by point and non-point pollution as well as invasive aquatic plant species that poses a maintenance issue for water supply equipment and could negatively affect water-base recreation. Lookout Shoals Lake is primarily used for hydroelectric power generation. Its secondary purpose is recreation. The conditions in this lake are similar to Lake Hickory since it is hydrologically connected to Lake Hickory, although there appears to be less affects from non-point sources. One direct similarity is the spread of invasive aquatic plant species. The upper reaches of the lake are impaired for its designated uses due to invasive species. The balance of the lake is meeting its designated uses. Lake Norman is the last impoundment in the study area. This lake is the largest man-made reservoir in the state and is used for power generation



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and recreation. This lake continues to be affected by point and non-point pollution sources and invasive species.

The Catawba River watershed drains mountainous areas in the region so many of the headwaters and many of these creeks have been designated as High Quality Waters. The 2003 Basinwide Assessment Report states that Johns River, Wilson Creek, Silver Creek, Smoky Creek, and Warrior Fork have bioclassifications of Good and Excellent. Wilson Creek has been designated as Outstanding Resource Waters.

3.4.3 Regional Water Quality Improvement Efforts

A number of water quality improvement projects and programs have been initiated and implemented in the four county region in recent years. Projects range from establishment of lakeside parks and greenways to stream restoration. The following is a representative sample of the regional efforts to improve water quality:

- **Catawba Meadows Park**—This park in the city of Morganton was funded by the Clean Water Management Trust Fund (CWMTF). The park has been developed on the site of a former U.S. Forest Service Research Center along Catawba River. This park includes a greenway connection along the riverfront and sports complex with an emphasis on baseball and softball fields.
- **Jumping Run Creek**—This Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) project was implemented in 2001 to restore the stream bank of Jumping Run Creek in Alexander County. The intent was to restore stream bank characteristics and improve aquatic habitat in a 7,000 foot segment of Jumping Run Creek that had been degraded by agricultural practices.
- **Brown Branch Stream Restoration**—This EPA project was implemented in 2002 to restore stream bank characteristics of Brown Branch in Caldwell County. A main goal of this project is to reduce the amount of sediment entering the stream and to reestablish a pool-riffle sequence in the stream bed.
- **Lenoir Greenway**—This project began with a grassroots effort to utilize low lying lands in the Lower Creek section of the city. A plan has now been established to connect these trails with the Lenoir Aquatic and Fitness Center to the northwest and Mulberry Recreation Center and Broyhill Walking Park to the south/southeast. This will establish a community-wide trail system within the city.
- **Granite Falls Lakeside Park**—This park in the city of Granite Falls was partially funded by the CWMTF. What appears to be a small park is actually a much bigger park. The developed area is the entrance to the park, which hugs the shoreline of Lake Rhodhiss. A restroom facility will be constructed in this area. The developed area includes a picnic shelter, parking, park benches and a boat ramp. A fishing pier/boat dock will be constructed. A canoe put-in will be constructed. There will be a three-mile loop trail extending to the west. There are three observation decks to provide fishing, visual access to the lake. An additional 30 acres will allow construction of a single-track trail. This park is a good example of quality of life improvement for the Granite Falls community and water quality enhancement.



Catawba River Greenway



Lakeside Park



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- **Glenn Hilton Park**—The expansion of this park in the city of Hickory was implemented through the CWMTF. A greenway that links to Lake Hickory and Geitner Rotary Park provides additional pedestrian opportunities through this portion of the city as well as access to Lake Hickory for paddlers.
- **Linville River/White Creek Land Acquisition**—This project was implemented through the North Carolina Ecosystem Enhancement Program (NCEEP) and intended to protect the riparian corridor between Linville Wilderness and Lake James State Park. The acquisition included 1,425 acres of land along a section of the Linville River that is designated as state-significant aquatic habitat and high-quality trout waters. Although development will be prevented in this area, the area will still be managed for limited public use by the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission.
- **Mingo Tract Land Acquisition**—This project also implemented through the NCEEP. This 5,648 acre tract is along the Caldwell County and Wilkes County border. This rugged land characterized by waterfalls, high ridges, rugged cliffs and deep ravines are in the headwaters of Buffalo Creek and will be managed for recreational uses by the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission. This area provides excellent habitat for flora and fauna, including black bear.
- **Catawba River Buffer Zone**—The North Carolina Environmental Management Commission adopted permanent rules to maintain a 50-foot buffer on all riparian shorelines along the Catawba River mainstream below Lake James. This however is increased to a 100-foot buffer in the Burke County region adopted by Article XII of the Burke County Zoning Ordinance. The buffer is divided into two zones: grading and clearing of vegetation are severely limited in the first zone. The second zone allows grading and clearing but there are strict requirements, including revegetation.
- **Local Watershed Committees**—Citizens and stakeholders in the region working to address water quality of streams and rivers. Two notable examples are the Lower Creek Technical Advisory Committee and the Catawba River Study Committee. The LCTA committee is addressing the myriad of issues related to water quality in Lower Creek, which is impaired. Water quality improvements to Lake Rhodiss will result by addressing conditions in Lower Creek. These committees are evaluating measures including stream restoration, Best Management Practices, riparian buffer management, among many other possibilities to enhance water quality in the region.
- **Duke Energy Catawba-Wateree Shoreline Management Plan and Guidelines**—The Shoreline Management Plan was updated in 2001. On September 1, 2006 additional updates were incorporated into the shoreline management plan and guidelines. The intent of these documents is to provide access and standards for development along the shoreline such as marinas and stabilization to the waters of the Catawba-Wateree Hydroelectric Project, but not to destroy natural resources within the waterway. Recommendations are presented to manage riparian habitat.



Canoe Launch at Glenn Hilton Park



Linville Gorge



Mortimer Campground

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- **The Muddy Creek Watershed Restoration Initiative (MCWRI)**—This project seeks to improve water quality and aquatic habitat in the Muddy Creek Watershed and in the Catawba River by significant reductions in sedimentation and other non-point source pollutants. This objective will be accomplished through voluntary partnerships with local landowners, innovative technology, education and funding of on-the-ground riparian buffer and streamside restoration projects. Partners in the MCWRI are Trout Unlimited, NC Wildlife Resources Commission, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, Foothills Conservancy of NC, Burke County, McDowell County, Duke Power Company, NC Clean Water Management Trust Fund, National Fish and Wildlife Federation and EPA.

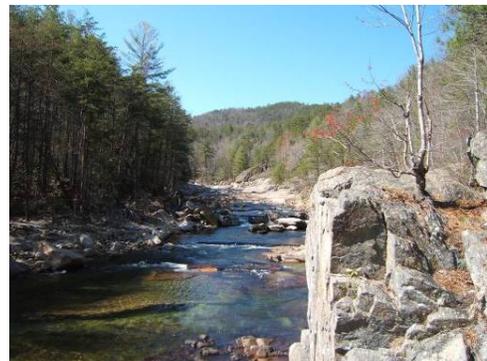
3.4.4 Resource Accessibility

Accessibility to riparian resources throughout the region varies widely. Linville Gorge Wilderness area is likely the least accessible waterway in the region by virtue of the wilderness designation and Class 5 rapids. The only road in the vicinity of the Linville River is Old NC 105 along the ridgeline to the west of the river. Lake James public access has been protected and increased by the new county and state parks along the northern shores. Although a large water body, access to Lake Rhodhiss is somewhat limited. Access to Lake Rhodhiss was recently improved with the development of Lakeside Park in Granite Falls. Access to tributaries of the Catawba River—with the exception of Wilson Creek—are also limited to community parks and occasional canoe/kayak put-ins. Examples include Henry Fork River Regional Recreation Park and a canoe/kayak put-in upstream from Catawba Meadows Park. Local paddle clubs have been utilizing shoreline around some road overpasses as put-ins for paddling along some of the Catawba River tributaries.

Lake Hickory and Wilson Creek are at the other end of the spectrum for resource accessibility in the region. There is a significant amount of access to Lake Hickory; however most of the access points are private docks. Examples of public access to Lake Hickory are Dusty Ridge Park access, Geitner Rotary Park, Glenn Hilton Park, Wittenberg Access boat ramp and Oxford Access area.

Wilson Creek has been designated as a Wild and Scenic River; however there is significant amount of access due to the unpaved road that parallels the river from its confluence with John's River, upstream to the Mortimer Campground.

Although a goal of this plan is to increase access to waterways in the region, providing access needs to be balanced with the need to protect the resource from degradation. This is particularly true for waters of high quality such as Wilson Creek, Upper Creek, John's Creek, and Mulberry Creek. These recommendations are intended to increase access to water resources and establish requirements for Best Management Practices (BMPs) for developing shoreline access. These BMPs are to be used whether access is a canoe/kayak put-in or a city park. Recommendations for resource accessibility are presented in Water Quality Recommendations and Land Acquisition.



Wilson Creek Gorge

Although access has been provided throughout the region, many times this access has been built with limited budgets and minimal development has occurred. An assessment of the improvements recommended for the existing access areas range from parking areas to restroom facilities. The following chart shows the recommendations to improve the existing public access areas in the region.

Alexander County

1. Dusty Ridge Access—Develop trail and provide restrooms.
2. Wittenberg Access—Acquire additional acreage and provide restrooms, picnic facilities, and additional parking.

Burke County

1. Linville Access—Convert existing access into canoe/kayak use; provide picnic facilities, shade trees, and restrooms.
2. Canal Bridge Access—No changes needed.
3. Bridgewater Access—Provide restrooms, launching ramp for trailered boats, additional parking and picnic facilities, and reevaluate the portage trail and signage and incorporate any need improvements.



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Burke County (Continued)

4. Watermill Road Access—Improve entrance and parking and improve launch for trailered vehicles.
5. Greenlee Ford Access (Judges Restaurant)—No improvements needed.
6. River Village Access—Improve canoe/kayak launch.
7. Johns River Access—Improvements to parking have been made recently.
8. Huffman Bridge Access—Improvements to parking have been made recently.
9. Rhodhiss Access—Provide restrooms.

Caldwell County

1. Castle Bridge Access—Provide restrooms.
2. Conley Creek Access Area—Construct two additional miles of trail.
3. Lakeside Park—Reconstruct boating access.
4. Lovelady Access—Construct a fishing pier if suitable resource conditions exist.
5. Gunpowder Access—No changes needed.

Catawba County

1. Geitner Park—No changes needed.
2. Glen Hilton Park—No changes needed.
3. Oxford Access—Provide a primitive campground, paved parking, picnic facilities, bank fishing, trails, swim beach and restrooms.
4. Riverbend Park—No changes needed.
5. Lookout Shoals Access—Provide restrooms.
6. Jacob Fork Park Access—No changes needed.
7. Henry Fork River Regional Recreation Park—No changes needed.



4.1 Prior Efforts

Different groups within the region have worked diligently on developing destination projects and major investments to promote tourism and economic development. The leadership in Burke County has worked for a number of years to protect Lake James and the surrounding area from sprawl style development and the derogating impacts associated to the area. As a result of these efforts, several initiatives have been put into place or in the process of implementation, most notably the Lake James Loop Trail, Lake James State Park expansion, Overmountain Victory National Historic Trail, and development regulations.

Caldwell County efforts in securing funding and construction of the Wilson Creek Visitor Center, along with the property acquisition within the gorge area have increased awareness and accessibility to this resource. Although many people who enjoy Wilson Creek are local, several more have come from out-of-town to enjoy the Wilson Creek waters.

The cities of Morganton and Hickory each have built sports complexes to accommodate their recreational field needs, but also to host regional tournaments. Catawba Meadows in Morganton is being built (the first phase is now completed) on the 230-acre former NC Forestry site. This is a complete recreation complex, and although focuses on baseball and softball, has many improvements that include a large portion of the Catawba Greenway, an observation tower, canoe and bike rentals, tennis courts, playgrounds, mountain biking course/trails, sand volleyball, horseshoe pits, 18 “hole” disc golf course and a festival area with a stage. The City of Hickory’s Henry Fork River Regional Recreation Park caters primarily to youth and adult soccer, but the 45-acre facility also has a large picnic pavilion, canoe launch, ropes course, walking trails and playgrounds. These two examples reflect the new trend of providing large scale recreation facilities to serve both the local resident for daily use and the larger regional area for targeted special events.



Wilson Creek Visitor Center



Henry Fork River Regional Recreation Park

The Upper Catawba River Paddle Trail was developed in a joint effort by the Western Piedmont Council of Governments, Catawba Valley Heritage Alliance and Caldwell County Pathways including grants from public and private agencies. This effort designates a paddle trail with defined portages and access points from the Black Bear Access west of Lake James to the Lookout Shoals Access at the end of Lookout Shoals Lake totaling an 82 mile trek along the Catawba River and the associated impoundments. This was one of the initial tasks in the development of regional recreation and tourism in the Greater Hickory Region.

4.2 Alternative Comparisons/Benchmarking

The approach for this scenario was to examine the natural resources and the best opportunities to capitalize or increase tourism in each individual county. A “benchmarking” approach to examine other regions and how they were able to take advantage of their resources. One example is the Kentucky Horse Park, a working horse farm, theme park and equine competition facility, which is the largest state owned tourist attraction. Data examined included number of visitors, jobs created, direct spending and overall total economic impact, which gives us an overview of the key economic indicators of the project.

In reviewing and comparing economic impact data for regions with similar resources, the team was able to benchmark the Greater Hickory Region’s potential in the development of recreation based tourism. Below are the communities and/or amenities used in this study:

4.2.1 Rabun Gap, Georgia

- Six County Region
- Chattooga River Corridor Study
- Year 2002 Study Data
- “Drought Year”—Data Considered Low
- Total Number of Visitors: 43,000
- Direct Spending: \$1,800,000
- Total Economic Impact: \$2,608,000

4.2.2 Wayne National Forest, Ohio

- Southeast Ohio Region
- Year 1996 Data
- Total Number of Visitors: 384,000
- Direct Spending: \$31,810,000
- Jobs: 1,024
- Income: \$24,971,000
- Total Economic Impact: \$45,768,000

4.2.3 Kentucky Horse Park

- Working Horse Farm, Theme Park and Equine Competition Facility
- Largest State Owned Tourist Attraction
- Year 2003 Study Data
- Total Number of Visitors: 913,000
- Direct Spending: \$100,200,000
- Jobs: 4,000
- Total Economic Impact: \$181,400,000



Chattooga River Rafting



Wayne National Forest

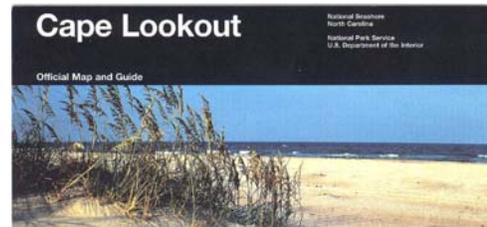


Kentucky Horse Park

5.1 Identity Recommendations

The approach in looking at this region is to develop a marketing package that can be used and adapted in different ways which can be used to market specific resources. This area is very diverse and leads itself to opportunities to many different people. However it is important that the information carries a similar look and message to identify with the region. The following are examples and recommendations which could, with further development, be used for such:

- “10 minutes from Urban to Wilderness” theme which is the idea that one can travel 10 minutes and go from an urban environment with shops and restaurants to the wilderness where hiking or camping could be enjoyed. This option can be used in several different variations which emphasizes the diversity of the area for a specific use such as:
 - 10 Minutes From Mountains To Meadows
 - 10 Minutes From Primitive To Proper
 - 10 Minutes From Whitewater To White Wine
 - 10 Minutes From Furniture To Flora
 - 10 Minutes From City Life To Country Life
 - 10 Minutes From Wildlife To White Linen
- Develop a single, unique look throughout the region which is recognizable; “Branding.” This idea develops a single format or look that is used throughout the region, with the specific information or content being adapted for use by that resource. An example (as seen here) is the National Parks Service who uses a standard format brochure with a thick black border and white letters to identify the resource. That format is recognizable across the country and one knows, or identifies with that as being an NPS resource. The content includes a written description and pictures on one side and a map of the area/resource on the reverse. It is recommended that any marketing plan include a particular style of branding as a necessary requirement which can be used across the region.
- A consolidated, integrated marketing plan is imperative of connecting the region and its resources. Being able to use information in a planned and organized way to attract visitors to the region necessitates an approach which is easily recognized, easy to use, provide relevant information and accessible. This should followed the adopted branding scheme developed and not have many different or various themes.



National Park Service Brochure

5.1.1 Framework

5.1.1.1 Inventory Map

The WPCOG and Open Space Task Force have created a region wide recreation inventory map identifying the resources and the activities available in each county. This Inventory Map contains a wealth of information and is a valuable information source. At this time, the Inventory Map is static and only used as a display.

It is recommended that the Inventory Map be expanded and developed as an internet driven power tool. The detail information is stored in a database file and is accessed by “clicking” on the resource identification point. Each reference point on the map will be expanded to contain detail data once it is selected on computer. This detailed information should include an independent webpage containing specific information related to that resource such as a written description of the resource, a map of the site, information of what one might see or do and pictures. Also other resource points with similar activities should be highlighted to allow the visitor to see similar opportunities in the region.

CHAPTER 5 – RECOMMENDED REGIONAL INITIATIVES

The sample from Maine shows a webpage on a bicycle trail. It shows a map to download and print a short and detailed description of the trail along with description and pictures of what you might see along the way. Also on the page there are listings of restaurants, lodging and since this is a bicycle trail, listing of bicycle shops in the area in case repairs are needed. Two national sites have this type or similar information are www.trails.com and www.americantrails.org.

Terrain: 63-mile loop is very hilly; 22-mile loop has flat to moderate grades

The 63-mile loop for well-conditioned cyclists originates from the coastal corridor and meanders through rural Waldo County - an area that can only be described as a bicyclist's paradise. Light traffic, quiet country roads, and plenty of scenery make Waldo County an area worthy of a single-day ride or a week-long expedition. The route meanders through the Passagassawakeag River Valley to Morrill and then ascends the high ridges between Brooks and Knox. From Knox, the route takes riders to the scenic St. George River Valley with its scattered farms and wonderful old homes. The last major climb ascends Appleton Ridge rewarding riders with breathtaking views.

Alternate 1 provides a much shorter and flatter 22-mile loop through the agricultural area west of Belfast.

[Click here to download a PDF with complete details about this tour.](#)

If you would like a hard copy of this PDF, please call us at 207-624-3250 and we'd be happy to help.

Special Features

- Breathtaking ridge views
- Hiking at Frye Mountain Wildlife Management Area
- Scenic village of Liberty
- Old mill towns
- St. George River Valley

Services

Bike Shops:

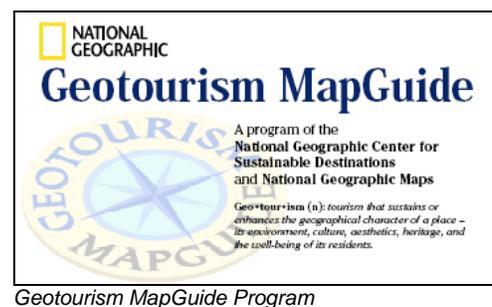
- Belfast Bicycles, Belfast, 207-338-0008
- Birgfield's Bike Shop, Searsport, 800-206-2916

For **lodging information**, contact:

5.1.1.2 Sponsor a Professional for Magazine Publication

An option for marketing, distribution of information and advertising is to sponsor a professional to the area to participate in a particular event. For example, the region should consider paying for the editor of Cycling Magazine to come to the area and ride in the annual Bridge-to-Bridge ride. In turn that editor would have an article written in the national magazine describing the event, people and places in the region to visit. This gives the region excellent exposure to a focused audience on a particular event, which in turn might interest them in coming to area for similar experiences. As a cautionary note, this should be used only after references are checked. Individuals can pose as freelance writers to gain trips and not benefit the community.

National Geographic also has options for communities or regions to feature in a variety of ways. One such service from their Center for Sustainable Destinations is the Geo-Tourism MapGuide program which could be used for the Greater Hickory Region to gain exposure, create a type of tourism that emphasizes the distinctiveness of its locale, and to develop a quality brochure for the region. According to National Geographic, this is widely used "to promote the types of tourism that best sustain the natural and cultural attributes of a place, especially benefiting the local



Geotourism MapGuide Program



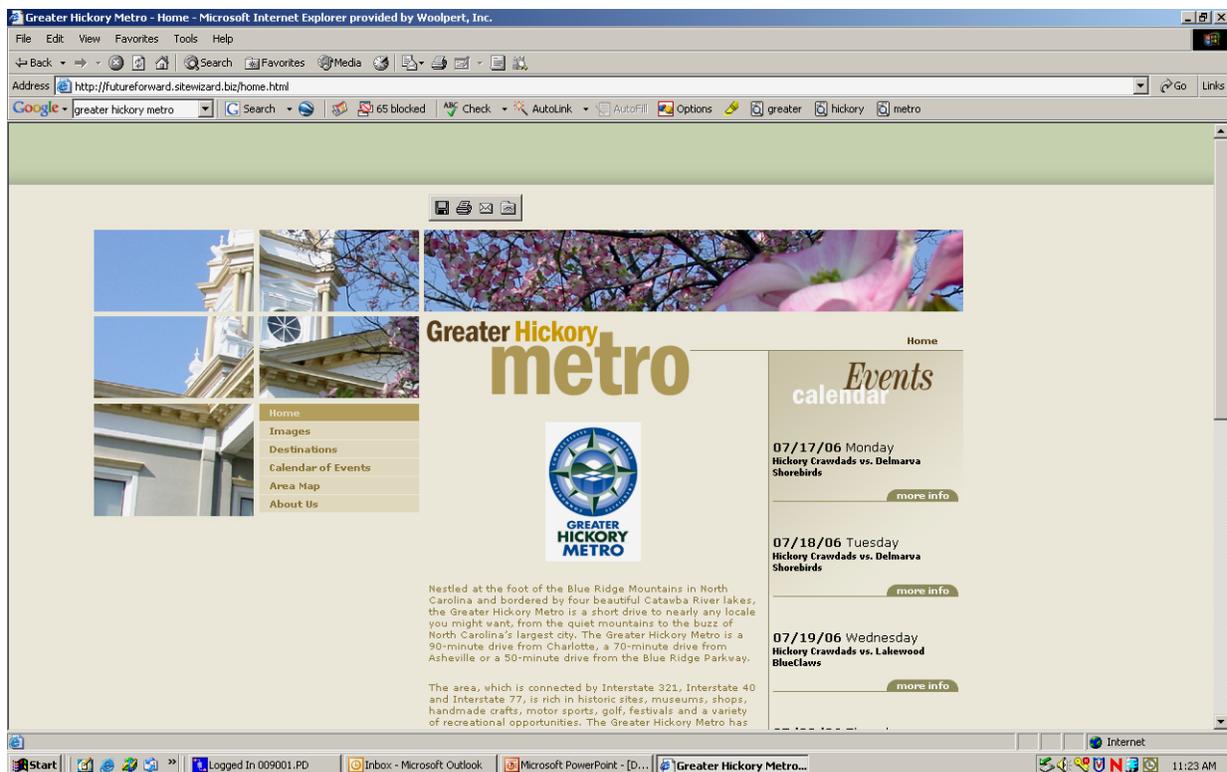
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communities.” These are very detailed maps which focus on culture and traditions, nature and environment, heritage sites, aesthetics and visitor experiences. National Geographic Explorer Magazine often features articles on areas written by key contributors. The authors generally will come into the area and spend time to understand the detailed characteristics which make the area unique.

5.1.1.3 Greater Hickory Website

Already in the process of being created, the development of a region-wide comprehensive Greater Hickory Metro Website is an important item that must be dynamic and contain worthwhile information. The site lists destinations as the local jurisdictions and its map is simply an image. The calendar of events is very well put together and there is good information in the text. Pictures are good quality, but are limited and a simple weather information piece should be added. It is a very good beginning and should continue to be expanded with more detailed and specific information. Keeping this information resource up to date and changing continually keeps the site looking fresh and always offering new information for users to see upon their return visits. This, along with the digital information included with Inventory Map, provides an exceptionally dynamic website.

Potential to customize a trip itinerary or highlight the visitor's interest areas can be integrated into the website. Pull-down menus can be organized by activity, the user selects a few interests (such as camping and canoeing) then regional trails or areas are automatically selected by a database program which matches directly to the selected activities. A “Create Your Own Adventure” allows a potential visitor to tailor their interest to the region's resources.



5.1.2 Specialty and Niche Appeal

5.1.2.1 Itineraries and Themed Trails

Another key aspect in visitor attraction is the creation of one, three, and five day itineraries with maps, and guides for distribution. This is a technique that helps first time visitors to the area to give them an idea of what to do and see during their visits. Often time these are not directly followed to each detail,



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but it does give options for visitors. This also opens new activities and ideas to those coming to the area who want to expand their experiences.

As a part of this, themed trails, such as those specific for birding or strenuous climbing, should be established to attract specific interest groups/activities. Bird watching, for example, has become a wide spread interest group adding to the economy. This group tends to be affluent with disposable income, buying expensive equipment including cameras and binoculars and traveling while staying in hotels.

5.1.2.2 Geocaching

Geocaching is a growing outdoor recreation activity in which all members of the family can participate. Geocaching is essentially a high tech scavenger hunt. A geocaching adventure can be in someone's hometown, or the adventure could lead participants around the world. Participants identify caches they would like to find and then utilize Global Positioning System (GPS) units to find the location of that cache. Once the cache is located an entry is written in the logbook at the site and the "reward" at the cache can be taken by the adventurer, however a new treasure should be left for the next person(s) that find the cache.

A similar scavenger hunt program is being developed by park and recreation districts throughout the country. These scavenger hunts are typically within city parks and the treasure is some relatively unknown natural or cultural resource. There are already numerous cache sites in the four county region. This is a program that can be organized on a local and regional scale and marketed to people across the country.

5.1.2.3 Wayfinding

Developing a wayfinding package is similar to branding and should be tied to such. A significant piece of wayfinding is a comprehensive sign package that lets the users know that a trail or park or any resource is an official part of the system, for example the Paddle-Pedal-Pedestrian trail network. This not only reassures the users that this is the right place, but also lets them know the resource has been built to a standard and generally maintained.



Coordinated Trail Signage

Wayfinding packages include many different information sources. Directional signage, identification signage, maps, information kiosks, and brochures all contribute to a regional identification and information network.

5.2 Recreation and Linkage Recommendations

5.2.1 Trails and Greenways – Paddle Trails/Blueways Information

A connected greenway/bikeway/sidewalk/paddle trail/corridor plans are strongly advocated in all jurisdictions in the region. The planning and development of multi-use trails and greenways, along with bike lanes and sidewalks are represented in the planning documents reviewed for this study. Opportunities for greenway connections are limited in the more urban areas where the connections to sidewalks or urban trails are encouraged.

The Catawba River is the "Key Connector" and "Unifying Element" that links all areas in the region (**the "interstate" or "main thoroughfare" of the trail network**). Master Plans are in place for developing segments of the river with various types of trails via land and water making it relatively easy to recommend the development of a **Paddle-Pedal-Pedestrian** trail strategy that will link the region. An important aspect in developing this strategy will be the naming of the trail so that it can be used as marketing tool that gives identity to the region. For example: "**Catawba P³, 3P, or PPP**."



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5.2.1.1 Trails and Greenway

Using proposed and existing trail networks will benefit the process and allow for connectivity to communities in the region. The concept is to develop a truly “multipurpose trail network” that will take people from urban areas to wilderness areas relatively seamlessly (Urban to Wilderness connection). This is important because they provide a basis for decision making and provide a “road map” for future trail and park development.

- The following general assumptions contribute to the overall recommendations:
 - Not all the trails need to be paved.
 - There must be a hierarchy of trails.
 - Paddle trail expansion and development will be the easiest to implement because they typically have little public opposition.
 - Introduction of paddle trails allow property owners to get acquainted with use and users, to gain acceptance and momentum for developing a multi-use trail network in the Region.
 - Connecting urban centers to the PPP must be encouraged and provided by existing or proposed sidewalks/pedestrian/greenway/bikeway networks.
 - Use of floodplains for trail development is a must! Use of floodplains for recreation can assist in meeting water quality initiatives. Land acquisition funds to secure riparian buffers and improve water quality can leverage dollars for development and grants.
 - Municipal Sidewalk Plans must be tied to the main corridors.
 - Regional Greenway Systems must be connected.
 - Bikeways and Bike Routes (shared and striped) must connect to the main corridor.
 - Hiking Trails (state and federal lands) will continue the network of connectivity into the wilderness.



Natural Based Trail

5.2.1.2 Water and Paddle Trails/Blueways

- General Recommendations:
 - Connecting urban centers by using existing or proposed paddle trail networks is encouraged.
 - Adoption of the NCDENR Paddle Trail Site Access Standards with a minimum “Level 1” access on each trail connection point or trail head.
 - Maximize the Urban to Wilderness connection through use of paddle trails.
 - Use of floodplains for recreation can assist in meeting water quality initiatives. Land acquisition funds to secure riparian buffers and improve water quality can leverage dollars for development and grants.
- The following corridors have been identified for development of paddle trail/blueway system totaling 176 miles:
 - **Catawba River (as completed in the River Trail Map and River Guide)**—The existing trail along the length of the Catawba River.
 - **Warrior Fork**—From a new trailhead near NC 181 and SR 1405 (a land acquisition parcel) approximately 7.5 miles to the Catawba River near the Catawba Meadows Sports Complex.
 - **Wilson Creek/Mulberry Creek/Johns River**—Using Wilson Creek, Mulberry Creek and Johns River



Wilson Creek Gorge

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within the Pisgah National Forest as multiple beginning points, then merging at the confluence of the Johns River and Wilson Creek (a land acquisitions recommendation), a running downstream on the Johns River to the Catawba River (Lake Rhodhiss). These three options give a variety of mileage treks; however, from the confluence of Wilson Creek south to the Catawba River, the trail is almost 12 miles in length.

- **Lower Creek**—The paddle trail begins at the Mulberry Recreation Center in Lenoir and follows Lower Creek to its confluence with the Catawba River (Lake Rhodhiss) for a trail length of approximately 12 miles. The Warrior Fork, Johns River and Lower Creek paddle trails merge within a 3.5 miles of each other along the Catawba River Trail.
- **Yadkin River**—In northern Caldwell County, this 11 mile paddle trail begins at the Happy Valley Ruritan Park on NC 268 and flows along the river to the proposed reservoir site near the Wilkes County line.
- **Lower Little River/Muddy Creek**—North of Taylorsville in Alexander County, this trailhead begins at Jaycee Park and flows to Lake Hickory for a distance of around 13 miles.
- **Henry River**—This paddle trail begins where NC 18 crosses over the Henry River and flows nearly 20 miles to Newton's new Jacobs Fork Park.
- **Jacobs Fork**—Also beginning where NC 18 crosses over Jacobs Fork, this trail runs almost 18 miles ending at the confluence with Henry River at Newton Jacobs Fork Park. Both the Henry River and Jacobs Fork Paddle Trails continue downstream along the South Fork of the Catawba River.

5.2.1.3 Greenways

As part of the plan the following eight major greenway corridors have been identified and deemed feasible for a detailed future development study. This is not intended to indicate specific alignments, but where regional greenways and trails are desirable and totals 95 miles:

1. **Lyle Creek Greenway**—Independent greenway trail which ties into the Hickory Urban trail network then travels through Conover, traverses around Rock Barn Golf and Spa along NC16, Saint John's Church Road to Rock Barn Road and then follows Lyle Creek once again past the Bunker Hill Bridge and Hunsucker Park in the Town of Catawba to the Catawba River (greenway trail length 13 miles).
2. **Newton Greenway/Maiden Link**—Independent greenway linking the Hickory Urban Trail network then following Clarks Creek through Newton past Jaycee and Southside Parks to Shady Branch in Maiden, then traveling upstream past Rosenwald Park then connecting to the Lincoln County Rail-to-Trails project (greenway trail length 10 miles).
3. **Taylorsville Greenway**—Independent greenway from Town Park, past Matheson Park along Stirewalt Creek to the Lower Little River Paddle Trail (greenway trail length 14 miles).
4. **Valdese Heritage Trail**—Independent greenway from downtown Valdese through the Waldensian Trail of Faith and Amphitheatre to McGalliard Park, then following McGalliard Creek to Lake Rhodhiss (a land acquisition site) (greenway trail length 4 miles).
5. **Yadkin Valley Greenway**—Combined greenway running parallel with the Yadkin River Paddle trial from the Happy Valley Ruritan Park, Patterson School, 7-Acre Park and close to Fort Defiance to the proposed reservoir near the county line (greenway trail length 11 miles).
6. **Catawba River Morganton Greenway**—Combined greenway with the Catawba River Paddle Trail extending the existing Morganton Greenway west to Bridgewater Access and east to the confluence of Johns Creek (a land acquisition site) (greenway trail length 17 miles).



Bunker Hill Covered Bridge



Waldensian Trail of Faith



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7. **Lower Creek Greenway**—Independent and Combined greenway beginning at the Lenoir Aquatic Center past Wilson Athletic Park and connecting the existing Lenoir Greenway Trail, then to Mulberry Recreation Center where it parallels with the Lower Creek Paddle Trail through Gamewell to the Catawba River (a land acquisition site) (greenway trail length 14 miles).

8. **Johns River Greenway**—Combined greenway beginning at the Colletsville Ruritan Park past the proposed land acquisition park at the confluence of the Johns River and Wilson Creek, then continuing on to the land acquisition park at the confluence of the Johns River and Catawba River (greenway trail length 12 miles).



Colletsville Ruritan Park Pavilion

These are the eight major greenway trails recommended as a part of this plan and should not be considered as stand-alone projects. Connecting these greenways to urban trails (sidewalks) is essential in creating an overall linked network throughout the region.

5.2.2 Greenway Structure and Development Information

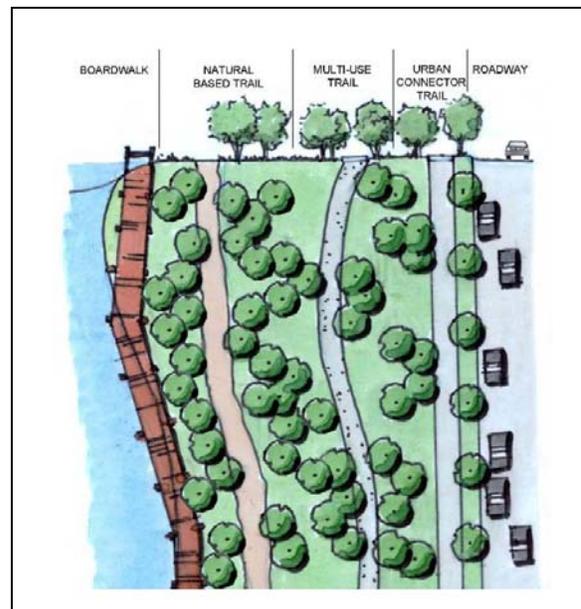
5.2.2.1 Benefits of Greenways

Greenways are being developed throughout the United States and the world as more communities realize their benefits. Benefits of greenways include items such as:

- Improving the overall quality of life within a community.
- Creating and/or assisting with preservation of open space for possible recreation opportunities.
- Encouraging physical fitness and healthy lifestyles to reduce healthcare cost and work absenteeism.
- Providing alternative means of transportation.
- Creating new opportunities for outdoor recreation.
- Improving local economies, (attracts potential tourism and can attract or retain employers who consider quality of life amenities vital to attracting or keeping employees).
- Providing connectivity between communities, neighborhoods, parks, schools and other focal points.
- Protecting the environment (by improving air/water quality and providing animal/habitat).
- Preserving historical and cultural resources.
- Bicycles use the greenways as well as bike routes (shared with roadways). Connection between the roads and greenways are essential. Some bike routes have been mapped by bicycle clubs such as the Hickory Velo Club and should be incorporated into an overall system.

5.2.2.2 Trail/Greenway Facility Types

As stated above greenway trails can be used for multiple purposes within a community. For all intense purposes they can occur in almost every type of environment imaginable—rural areas, suburban areas, unique natural areas, urban centers etc. The following text identifies trails and greenway types commonly used within a system. The identified types or sections are not intended to be all encompassing but rather a suggestion of how they can be categorized in terms of facility development. A single trail corridor can include various trail types or sections to accommodate the surround environment and land use. This composite diagram (or transect) of the greenway types and cross-sections recommended for the region:

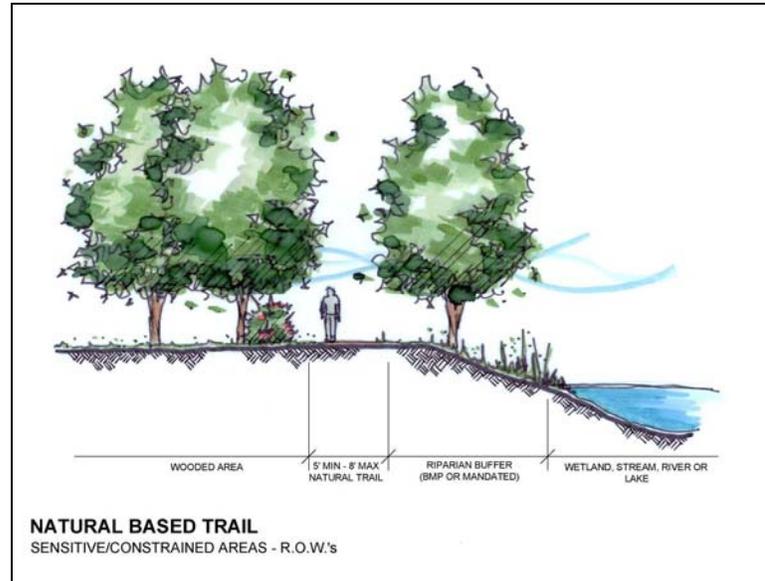


Greenway Types Transect

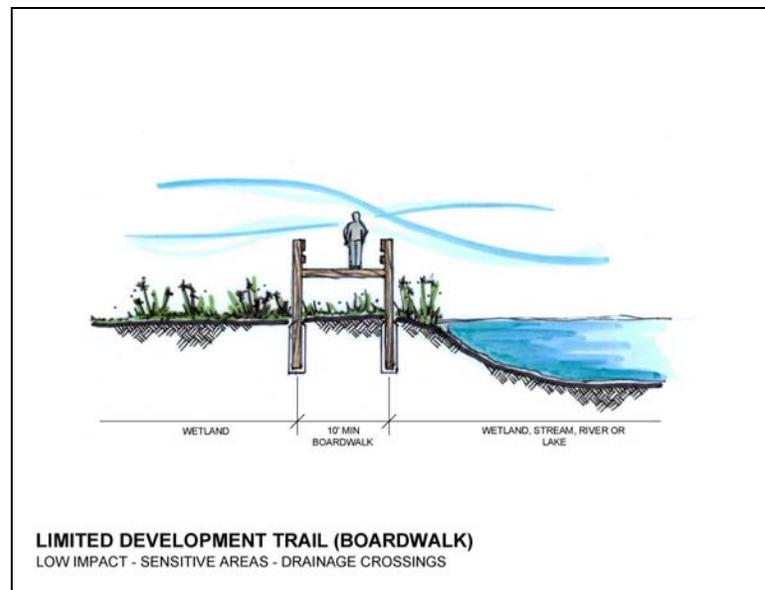


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- **No Facility Development (Natural Based Trail)**—This type or section is used in corridors that contain environmental constraints and/or other constraints that might make development difficult, undesirable, or even impossible. Constraints might include steep topography, ecologically sensitive areas, wetlands, or restricted land-use requirements commonly found with right-of-ways or easements. This types of corridor typically remains in a natural state with very limited trail development, if any at all.

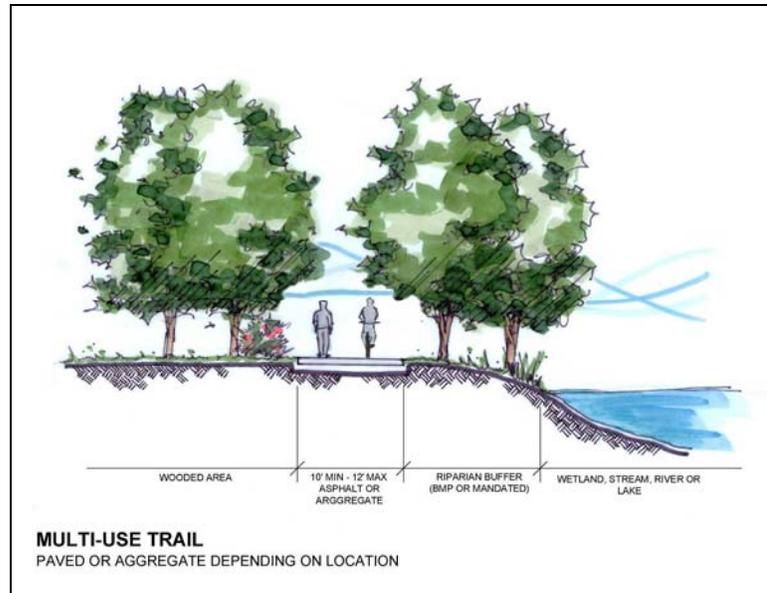


- **Limited Development/Low Impact Section**—This type of sections is used most commonly where environmentally sensitive areas such as wetlands or water quality resource areas that limit trail surface construction more natural materials such as crushed stone/aggregates or stabilized dirt. On-grade trails are typically 4 feet wide such as those typically found on hiking trails used for less experienced trekkers. Boardwalks are typically found with this type of trail to cross wetlands, streams, and environmentally sensitive areas.

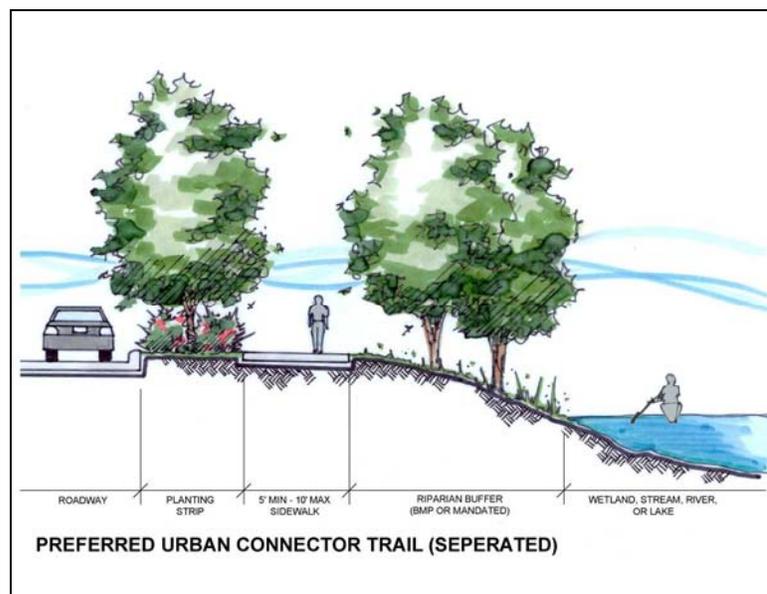


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- **Multi-Use Paved or Unpaved/Aggregate Trail Section**—This form of trail is predominantly identified with heavily used routes that are designed for use by pedestrians, bicyclist, and other recreational activities. Trail width is typically 10 feet minimum to accommodate two-way traffic. Paved trails are commonly used for high use zones and areas susceptible to flooding or severe erosion. Unpaved trails are typically located in areas that are not susceptible to flooding or severe erosion and the surface is made of compacted crushed stone or other aggregates. Unpaved trails are typically found where a more natural or rural setting is preferred and a smooth surface is not required by its designated users. Unpaved trail sections can also be reduced in width to 6 to 8 feet depending on the location and use. Where appropriate amenities found at along these trails may include benches, ID/location signage, directional signs, and picnic facilities.



- **Preferred Urban Trails Section (Sidewalks and Bikeways)**—Where off-road corridors are not possible or difficult due to urban conditions, trail may need to follow exiting streets and roadways by using sidewalks and bike lanes. The preferred section identifies separating the path from the road but sight conditions may not make this possible. Trails of this type vary in width depending on their location but in all cases should be a minimum of 5 feet wide. Bikeways should be striped lanes at 4 feet minimum whether on-road or separated.



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- **Water or Paddle Trails/Blueways**—These can occur on rivers or streams designated to support paddlers (canoes, kayaks) that can accommodate and/or designated to support canoeing or kayaking. Put-ins, improved rapids and safety systems should be installed at appropriate locations to make these types of greenway trails more enjoyable for all users. Adoption of the NCDENR Paddle Trail Site Access Standards should be reviewed for implementation. “Level 1” access to each trail connection point or trail head should be a minimum standard.

5.2.2.3 Trail/Greenway Implementation Process or Action Steps

Assuming a conceptual corridor has been identified the following information identifies the process or tasks taken for implementing a trail.

- **Task 1: Feasibility Confirmation**—Can the proposed conceptual corridor be implemented. Begin gathering more detailed information about the conceptual corridor. Information may include boundary data, local ordinances, land-use relationships, other proposed projects, and existing plans. Review of this data may identify a need for an alternative route or alignment. The result of this work is to identify land acquisition needs and to start the public involvement process needed to get “buy-in” for implementation
- **Task 2: Public Involvement**—Present the findings of the feasibility confirmation and allow the public to decide the priorities and needs within the corridor. The final plan must reflect the needs of the final users and allow for “buy-in” from community stakeholders necessary for the project to move forward. Without community “buy-in” decision makers, be they governmental or private, will be less likely to provide assistance.
- **Task 3: Land Acquisition**—It is necessary to have land secured for the planned route before detailed planning occurs. An ownership interest can be achieved through out right purchase and various methods such as trusts, rights-of way, and easements agreements. A variety of land acquisition techniques are available for both public and private interests.
- **Task 4: Master Planning**—The appropriate level of use for a corridor and its routing is determined during the site specific master planning process. The process should involve residents and stakeholders to prioritizing and influence final trail development plans. The plan should also address responsibilities for security, maintenance and operations of the trail and who is assigned those responsibilities.
- **Task 5: Detailed Design and Construction Documentation**—Once the master plan has been completed and the corridor plan is defined, detailed costs and construction documents will be produced for construction purposes. The constructions documents define the scope of work, material and expected level of care to construct finished project.
- **Task 6: Construction and Facility Development**—Actual construction of the greenway facilities, such as the trail and associated support facilities/amenities takes place during this Task. Construction can be phased as necessary to meet budget and time constraints but must ultimately meet the requirements established by the end users
- **Task 7: Maintenance and Operations/Management**—Operations and maintenance includes providing for trash collection, vegetation removal and control, pavement and facility repairs and security. It begins immediately after, if not during, the final construction of the project.

5.2.2.4 Greenway Development Costs

The following facility costs are presented to establish a basis for estimating proposed sections of trails at a conceptual or budget level. The cost listed for each item identifies “IN-PLACE COST” and includes labor, material, and installation. Unit costs do not include land acquisition expenses or engineering and design development fees. Design and administration fees are typically between 10 to 15 percent of construction costs but they are not included in the unit cost estimates shown.



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No Facility Development

Landscape Planting/Vegetation Costs	Unit
▪ Trees (2.5" to 3" Caliper)	\$500 Each
▪ Shrubs (3 Gallon)	\$35 to \$50 Each
Steambank Stabilization (Bioengineering)	\$35 to \$65/LF (\$50 to \$55/LF Average)

Limited Facility Development

Trail Bed/Material	
▪ 4- to 6-Foot Earthen Hiking/Mountain Bike Trail	\$15,000/Mile
▪ 4- to 5-Foot Aggregate Trail	\$30,000/Mile
▪ 10-Foot Wood Deck/Boardwalk Trail	\$75 to \$85/Foot

Costs include site preparation, clearing, grading, and mobilization.

Multi-Use Paved or Unpaved Trail Facility Development

Trail Bed	
▪ 10-Foot Asphalt Multipurpose Trail	\$250,000/Mile
▪ 10-Foot Concrete Multipurpose Trail	\$400,000/Mile
▪ 10-Foot Aggregate/Stone Trail	\$75,000/Mile
▪ 10-Foot Wood Deck/Boardwalk Trail	\$75 to \$85/Foot

Costs include site preparation, clearing, grading, and mobilization.

General Items/Support Facilities

▪ Parking	
▪ Paved Lots	\$1,500 Each Car
▪ Aggregate Lots	\$1,000 Each
▪ Lighting Low	\$2,500 Each
▪ Lighting (High/Parking)	\$3,000 Each
▪ Entrance Signage	\$3,000 to \$5,000 Each
▪ Signage	
▪ Information Signs	\$250 Each
▪ Directional Signs	\$250 Each
▪ Warning Signs	\$250 Each
▪ Mile Markers	\$75 Each
▪ Furniture/Furnishings	
▪ Pre-Fabricated Steel Bridges	\$1,500/Foot
▪ Benches	\$800 Each
▪ Security Bollards	\$250 Each
▪ Fencing (Board-On-Board or Vinyl)	\$25 to \$300/LF
▪ Gates (Single)	\$850 Each
▪ Gates (Double)	\$1,500 Each
▪ Trash Receptacles	\$300 Each
▪ Bicycle Racks	\$500 Each

5.2.2.5 Public Recreation Lands and Facilities

An essential piece for connections of the trail network are the National, State, Regional, and Local Key Lands and Facilities. These connections ensure a truly cohesive network of open space and recreational facilities:

- Existing National, State, and Regional Trails in the Region:
 - Mountains to Sea Trail (Hiking)
 - Mountains to Sea Bicycle Trail
 - Section A-5 Brown Mountain Lights
 - Section A-6 Carolina Emerald
 - Piedmont Spur Bicycle Trail
 - Section B-1 Lone Mountain
 - Overmountain Victory National Historic Trail
 - Catawba River Trail
 - Blue Ridge Parkway



Wilson Creek

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- Local Public Recreation Key Lands and Facilities:
 - Rocky Face Park Development
 - Catawba Meadows Complex
 - Lake James State Park
 - South Mountains State Park
 - Linville Gorge and Pisgah National Forest
 - Wilson Creek Improvements
 - Riverbend Park
 - Bakers Mountain Park
 - Caldwell County Pathways Greenway
 - Henry Fork River Regional Recreation Park
 - Several more not mentioned, plus numerous existing river access areas.



Glenn Hilton Park

5.3 Environmental Recommendations

5.3.1 Water Quality

Because the use of shoreline along regional waterways is increasing, recommendations for shoreline access needs to include measures to mitigate negative effects to water quality as well as ensure that high quality waters are not degraded. Water quality recommendations in this section include measures for managing shoreline activities and minimizing potential impacts from outdoor recreation activities, use of shoreline and floodplain for commercial activities and maintaining riparian habitat. Overall efforts should be taken to preserve and enhance all streams, wetlands, floodplains, and other water features and incorporate them into the PPP trail network.



Waters of Wilson Creek

5.3.2.1 Water Quality Recommendations

- **Establish and Implement Best Management Practices (BMPs) for Recreational Field Management in Floodplains**—Because many sports fields are in floodplains of the Catawba and Yadkin Rivers, storm water runoff and the amount of herbicides, pesticides and other chemicals should be managed. Management of storm water runoff and land management chemicals would reduce sediment loads, herbicides, fertilizers and other pollutants reaching local streams and rivers.
- **Collaborate with Duke Energy to Implement Riparian Management Recommendations in the Catawba-Wateree Shoreline Management Plan and Shoreline Management Guidelines**—Continue collaboration with Duke Energy to implement the shoreline management plan, enforce buffers and guidelines that were recently updated. This plan identifies water quality, habitat protection and recreation management measures for Lake James, Lake Rhodhiss, Lake Hickory, Lookout Shoals Lake and Lake Norman.
- **Implement Wilson Creek National Wild and Scenic River Plan and the Wilson Creek Corridor Recreation Plan**—Wilson Creek has been designated as a Wild and Scenic River; however it is also a recreation resource that experiences high demand from Spring through Fall. There is significant potential for an outstanding outdoor recreation experience for visitors, however there is a potential for resource degradation due to visitor impacts. Actions that would benefit visitor experience and



Wilson Creek Gorge



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mitigate water quality degradation include acquisition of parcels; directing visitors to specific areas along the corridor for parking and picnicking. Minimize new developed areas for visitors and do not allow new road construction.

- **Manage Storm Water Runoff from Parking Lots at River/Lake Access Points**—Large parking lots associated with boat ramps result in a rapid runoff of storm water. This storm water runoff is hotter than the waterway and contains pollutants from motor vehicles parked in the lot. Lake access parking lots should include a BMP storm water management system to slow storm water runoff and to filter pollutants. Wherever possible, development practices should minimize the potential for runoff problems, soil erosion, and flooding through appropriate innovative approaches to storm water management such as Low Impact Development (LID) standards. The photo shows an example of a storm water management system at the Wittenberg Access.



Wittenberg Access Parking Area

- **Encourage Local Communities to Implement Storm Water BMPs in Park/Greenway Design and Operation**—One of the most significant contributors to degraded water quality in the region is non-point source pollution. The North Carolina Department of Environment and Natural Resources, Division of Water Quality has developed a Storm Water Best Management Practices manual. This manual provides information on managing storm water runoff utilizing wet detention basins, storm water wetlands, sand filters, bioretention areas, grassed swales, filter strips, and other infiltration devices.
- **Partner with the NC Division of Water Quality and the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service to Establish BMPs for Tree/Shrub Nurseries Operating Along Regional Floodplains**—There are numerous locations where tree/shrub nurseries operate along the floodplains in the region. To mitigate negative effects from storm water runoff from these operations, a partnership should be created to establish storm water BMPs for these agricultural operations.
- **Coordinate Public Education Programs on the Benefits of Water Quality to the Public's Health, the Local Economy, and the Ecosystem**—A comprehensive public education program should be established to promote the benefits of a high level of water quality. The program should be integrated into regional school science programs and local community planning efforts. This effort should be coordinated with the NC Division of Water Quality, Cooperative Extension and the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service.
- **Establish Stream Clean-Up/Adopt-A-Stream Programs**—These programs would benefit from the regional water quality educational program. The educational programs should promote the benefits of active involvement in maintaining clean riparian habitat throughout the region. These programs could be promoted to Boys and Girls Clubs, Boy and Girl Scout Troops, schools, religious institutions, local businesses, paddle clubs and interested individuals.
- **Establish a Catawba River/Yadkin River Tributary Buffer Zone Program**—The State of North Carolina established the Catawba Riparian Buffer Protection Rules for the mainstream of the Catawba River. This program should be expanded to include the first and second order tributaries of the Catawba and Yadkin Rivers. An appropriate buffer width should be established for the tributaries. This program could be modeled after the Chesapeake Bay Program or the established 100-foot buffer rules in Burke County.



Henry River



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- **Develop Partnerships with Land Conservancy and Conservation Organizations**—There is a significant amount of land that should be conserved to aid in improving/maintaining water quality throughout the region. To maximize conservation of lands, a strategy of land acquisition should be enhanced through strong efforts to establish conservation easements in headwaters and along riparian corridors. This effort will be maximized through partnerships with state and not for profit land conservation organizations. A listing of land conservation organizations that could be contacted is provided in this document. The following are higher priority recommendations integrating land conservation and regional water quality; however partnerships with these organizations will likely identify many more areas in the region that should be conserved. Coordinate additional conservation easements when the NC Natural Heritage Program releases the Natural Area Inventories for Alexander County and Caldwell County.
- **Establish a Conservation Easement for the Jonas Ridge Bog**—Coordinate with a land conservation organization and the NC Natural Heritage Program to establish a conservation easement for the Jonas Ridge Bog, as delineated by the NC Natural Heritage Program. This bog area is in the headwaters of Upper Creek. The NC Division of Water Quality has designated this area as Outstanding Resource Waters.
- **Establish a Conservation Easement for the Cranberry Knob Bogs and Swamp Forest**—Coordinate with a land conservation organization and the NC Natural Heritage Program to establish a conservation easement for private lands in the Cranberry Knob Bogs and Swamp Forest, as delineated by the NC Natural Heritage Program. This area is also in the headwaters of Upper Creek. The NC Division of Water Quality has designated this area as Outstanding Resource Waters. The NC Wildlife Resources Commission has designated this area as Wild Trout Waters.
- **Establish a Conservation Easement for the Jacob Fork West Corridor**—Coordinate with a land conservation organization and the NC Natural Heritage Program to establish a conservation easement for these lands along the Jacob Fork, as delineated by the NC Natural Heritage Program. This area includes riparian and upland areas and includes the nationally significant Catawba County Wildlife Club Heartleaf Site. This site is currently registered with the NC Natural Heritage Program as a Natural Heritage Area.
- **Establish a Conservation Easement for the Jacob Fork East Corridor**—Coordinate with a land conservation organization and the NC Natural Heritage Program to establish a conservation easement for these lands along the Jacob Fork, as delineated by the NC Natural Heritage Program. This area is approximately two miles further downstream from the Jacob Fork West Corridor.
- **Establish a Conservation Easement for the Catawba River Corridor**—Coordinate with a land conservation organization and the NC Natural Heritage Program to establish a conservation easement for the riparian corridor of Catawba River, east of Riverbend Park in Catawba County. This area is delineated by the NC Natural Heritage Program. This riparian corridor is stated as containing a rich collection of avian fauna. Riverbend Park is known regionally as an outstanding area for birding. This plan recommends acquiring parcels to expand Riverbend Park. In addition to park expansion, a conservation easement for this area would significantly benefit ecological habitat and outdoor recreation importance of Riverbend Park.
- **Establish a Conservation Easement for the Lyle Creek Corridor**—Coordinate with a land conservation organization and the NC Natural Heritage Program to establish a conservation easement for the riparian corridor along Lyle Creek. The NC Natural Heritage Program has delineated a corridor extending from Rock Barn Road south to the Old Highway 70 overpass. This area includes the Bunker Hill Covered Bridge and Roadside Park, which is covered in the Land Acquisition recommendations. The corridor should extend to the confluence with the Catawba River



Catawba River at Riverbend Park



to enhance ecological functioning of the corridor, water quality and the experience for paddlers. The wetland at the confluence of Lyle Creek and Catawba River should be part of the conservation easement. This wetland has also been delineated by the NC Natural Heritage Program.

- **Develop an Inventory and Monitoring Program for Wilson Creek**—As recreation demand continues to grow for this Wild and Scenic River, the potential for degraded water quality is a concern. An inventory and monitoring program would provide early indications if water quality were indeed being degraded through visitor impacts or other activities. The program should include establishment of indicators of water quality and then methods to monitor those indicators. If needed, this program could be expanded to address other impacts to natural and scenic resources due to heavy visitation. If impacts from visitors results in degraded water quality or outdoor experiences, then management actions should be considered to mitigate or eliminate threats to this Wild and Scenic River.



Wilson Creek

5.3.2 Resource Accessibility and Land Acquisition

Achieving the goals of increasing outdoor recreation opportunities, protecting water quality and providing more access to water resources in the region will require multiple strategies to implement. One strategy is to acquire land in a variety of locations throughout the region. Land acquisition recommendations presented in this report are intended to build on current regional success stories of creating parks, greenways, and public access facilities along waterways in the four county region. In addition to increasing the acreage of existing parks and public access facilities, implementation of these recommendations will provide new locations throughout the region where residents and tourists can enjoy the natural environment, get exercise, and partake in a variety of outdoor recreation activities.

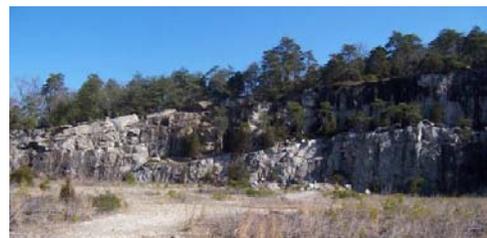
- **Confluence of Catawba River and Linville River (Burke County)**—The final agreement of the Catawba-Wateree Project FERC relicensing agreement includes articles of agreement. Article 10.27.3.3 addresses the conveyance of 420 acres of land along the Catawba River in the vicinity of the Bridgewater Regulated River Reach. This land will be conveyed to the NC Department of Environment and Natural Resources to be managed for multiple public recreation opportunities. The article also states that the perpetual 100-foot (50-foot easements on each shoreline) conservation easements established in Article 4.5.1 are still in effect.
- **Confluence of Johns River and Wilson Creek (Caldwell County)**—The confluence of these two waterways provides a great opportunity to provide access and protect water quality. The Wilson Creek Corridor Plan and the Colletsville Community Plan recommend that a two acre parcel be acquired and developed for canoe/kayak access and picnicking. Development of this site would include parking, signage/interpretive information. This site would also become a trailhead for the Wilson Creek Trail and the Johns River Trail. An access easement for the road to the site would be required from the neighboring land owner. This land acquisition should be completed in association with the leasing of 100 acres of land from Duke Energy, which is discussed in Article 10.27.5.2 of the FERC agreement. The 100-acre parcel extends north from the confluence to Adako Road.
- **Confluence of Johns River and Catawba River (Burke County)**—Article 10.27.5.4 of the FERC relicensing agreement addresses the acquisition of up to 2,882 acres of land in the vicinity of the confluence of Johns River and Lake Rhodhiss (Catawba River). The land acquisition proposed by The Foothills Land Conservancy and/or the NC WRC is supported by this article. The land would be managed for gamelands; however the land management strategy would divide the area into public outdoor recreation and permanent conservation lands that are compatible with outdoor recreation. If the NC WRC does indeed participate in land acquisition and land management of all proposed lands, it will take land management responsibilities for the bog turtle habitat in the Bristol Creek watershed.

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- **Land West of Henry Fork River Regional Recreation Park (Catawba County)**—The Henry Fork River Regional Recreation Park offers a variety of outdoor activities, including eight soccer fields. In order to add more fields and increase the tournament hosting potential for the region, the complex could be expanded by acquiring the 47-acre parcel, or portion of the parcel, to the west. The southern half of this parcel, adjacent to the Henry Fork, contains adequate land to accommodate four new fields and expand the recreation opportunities at the facility.
- **Parcels at NC 127 Overpass at Jacobs Fork (Catawba County)**—The NC 127 overpass at Jacobs Fork would provide access for canoe/kayak paddlers. The plan for access includes construction of a gravel parking lot that would accommodate approximately five motor vehicles, a canoe/kayak launch site, and a gate to provide some security to the site.
- **Acquire Land for a Mountain Creek Park (Catawba County)**—Through the FERC agreement, the acquisition of a 600 acre tract for public recreation at the mouth of Mountain Creek on Lake Norman for a large recreational park as a part of the Catawba County Park System. Facility development is slated to include restrooms, canoe launch, trails, campgrounds, swimming area, and other water-based activities to be maintained by the county. This is the last remaining large acreage tract in the Mountain Creek/Lake Norman area. It is significant to the protection of the water quality, wetland habitat and to provide public access in the cove.
- **Acquire State Gamelands (Catawba County)**—Originally a part of the FERC agreement but not approved, are the state designated gamelands located on private property north of Hudson Chapel Road in eastern Catawba County. Presently there are no other regional gameland areas in this urban environment between Burke and Mecklenburg counties. This backwater habitat for wildlife and waterfowl offers large acreage recreation potential and public access to upper Lake Norman. This is an important tract of land with water access and environmentally sensitive lands suitable for extensive conservation, trail development, and passive recreation.
- **Expand Hunsucker Park (Catawba County)**—The final agreement of the Catawba-Wateree Project FERC relicensing agreement includes articles of agreement. Article 10.27.15.1 addresses the potential for leasing land on the south side of Lyle Creek from Duke Energy within five years of the successful issuance of the FERC license. Article 10.27.15.1 states that the leased land should be incorporated into the Town of Catawba's Hunsucker Park, which is on the south side of Lyle Creek. The agreement will require development of a trailered-boat access, picnic facilities, trail, and parking.
- **Confluence of McGalliard Creek and Lake Rhodhiss (Burke County)**—The confluence of McGalliard Creek and Lake Rhodhiss would be the terminus of a greenway trail that extends from downtown Valdese. The trail would connect the cultural center at the Old Rock School with the Trail of Faith, McGalliard Park, and then extend along McGalliard Creek to the confluence. The connections between Old Rock School and McGalliard Park would be primarily wayfinding signage and a paved trail. McGalliard Park could also function as a trailhead for the greenway system.
- **Rocky Face Mountain Parcels (Alexander County)**—The old rock quarry on the south side of Rocky Face Mountain has been identified as a great opportunity for development of an outdoor recreation magnet site. A master plan for this outdoor recreation center has been developed; however the outdoor recreation opportunities should be further explored in this area. Additional acreage should be evaluated to enhance recreation opportunities and minimize encroachment from other types of development. The NC Natural Heritage Program



McGalliard Park



Rocky Face



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has not yet published the Natural Area Inventory for Alexander County, but Rocky Face Mountain has been identified as a location of significant natural resources. Coordination should occur with the NC Natural Heritage Program to ensure that none of the significant natural resources would be negatively affected by the development of an outdoor recreation site. To ensure that the significant natural areas are not affected, they should be acquired and managed, or conservation easements should be developed.

- **Mid-Point Parcels on Lookout Shoals (Catawba County)**—Public boating access is limited on Lake Lookout Shoals from Riverbend Park and to the access area near Lookout Shoals Dam. Therefore non-motorized boats, primarily canoes and kayaks, must travel the entire lake or stay within close proximity to those access points. A mid-point access area is designated in the FERC relicensing which includes approximately five acres downstream of “the bend” and be developed with a trailer access and boating area with associated parking, restrooms and primitive camping.

- **Lyle Creek/Bunker Hill Bridge (Catawba County)**—Bunker Hill Covered Bridge is the last remaining “Haupt Improved Lattice Truss” bridge and one of the two remaining covered bridges in the state. Presently it is accessible by a path from US70 and only a small amount of land at the bridge is available for public use. Acquisition of a 280 acre parcel is important to develop a park featuring the Bunker Hill Covered Bridge and the Lyle Creek Greenway and Paddle Trail, which bisects the property, and provide better access. This amount of land will also garner adequate land to incorporate additional facilities such as a canoe launch, picnic shelters and potentially other recreational activities and hiking/biking trails.



Bunker Hill Covered Bridge

- **Expand Riverbend Park (Catawba County)**—As noted above, Riverbend Park is already known as a significant location for birders in the region. The park is contiguous with a segment of land along the Catawba River that has been identified by the NC Natural Heritage Program as an important riparian corridor due to the richness of avian fauna. Acquisition of additional parcels to expand Riverbend Park would significantly enhance outdoor recreation opportunities. Incorporating additional land into a park could provide more low-impact access to natural areas for residents and birders from throughout the region. An expanded park would coexist nicely with riparian lands under a conservation easement.

- **Henry River Mill Village Area (Burke County)**—This area is a former mill village that has been deserted for years that contains several residential structures and a general store in good condition. There may be potential to develop the old mill town as an artisan village. To the south of the old mill town area is undeveloped land that provides access to the Henry Fork River. The undeveloped land to the north of the mill town provides an opportunity to build a mixed-use area that could extend to the interstate. The mill town area could focus on tourists with restaurants, gift and artisan stores and galleries, outfitters/canoe, kayak and bike rentals, a canoe/kayak launch site. The mill town is on the study list for its eligibility for listing in the National Register of Historic Places and the application should be completed as early as possible. Tax credits would be available for redevelopment. This area is adjacent to a NC Natural Heritage area. The land adjacent to the mill town should be acquired to conserve natural resources and enhance water quality. If all lands designated by the NC Natural Heritage Program are not available for acquisition, then conservation easements should be pursued.



One of the former Mill Village Structures

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- **Murray's Mill (Catawba County)**—This historic site is an important cultural asset and many steps have been taken to preserve the former mill and general store. Balls Creek traverses through three noteworthy tracts of land that should be acquired to continue to preserve the historical character of the site. The most significant is the 133 acre tract to south of the mill, which allows for the expansion of the facilities at the site, including an amphitheatre, exhibits along with a recreated historic home site and barn. These plans are in accordance with the proposed overall site plan and recommendations of the Catawba County Historic Association.



General Store at Murray's Mill

- **Yadkin River Canoe/Kayak Access Areas (Caldwell County)**—The Yadkin River is an opportunity to create additional outdoor recreation experiences and link cultural resources such as Patterson School and Fort Defiance. Caldwell County has prepared plans for the Yadkin River Valley that include the Yadkin River Greenway and Yadkin Valley Community Park. These areas should be tied into a paddle trail along the Yadkin River. Canoe/kayak access areas would be located along the greenway and at the community park. Canoe/kayak launch sites should also be located in the vicinity of Patterson School the Yadkin Valley Central Business District and Happy Valley Elementary School.
- **Johns River/Mulberry Creek Canoe/Kayak Access Areas (Caldwell County)**—Land acquisition along the Johns River and Mulberry Creek would serve dual purposes. Land along the banks of these waterways should be acquired to provide canoe/kayak launch sites as part of a paddle trail that extends to the Catawba River. These sites would also benefit water quality.

- **Acquire Wilson Creek Gorge Parcels (Caldwell County)**—The recommendations in the Caldwell County Wilson Creek Corridor Recreation Plan and the National Park Service's (NPS) Wilson Creek National Wild and Scenic River Comprehensive Plan include acquisition of parcels for outdoor recreation improvements. The County's plan recommends acquiring a 4.5 acre parcel at Brown Mountain Beach Road and Adako Road; a 4.9 acre parcel further upstream on Brown Mountain Beach Road, and a 2.0 acre parcel at the confluence of Wilson Creek and John's River. The NPS plan provides general guidance that is to be taken in consideration with existing Pisgah National Forest Management Plans. General



Land Acquisition parcel on Wilson Creek

- direction provided in the NPS plan includes acquisition of private in-holdings from willing sellers. In lieu of willing sellers, conservation easements should be developed.
- **Confluence of Warrior Creek and Upper Creek (Burke County)**—Regional recreation opportunities would be enhanced with the development of a paddle trail launch site and trailhead in the vicinity of SR 1405/SR 181 in Burke County. This location is located near the Brown Mountain OHV Area and the Boone Fork Campground. The proximity of these outdoor experiences with overnight camping provides visitors the ability to travel less and experience more natural resources.
- **Confluence of Lail Creek and Lake Rhodhiss (Burke County)**—Lake Rhodhiss still has a relatively undeveloped lake shore with a limited number of private docks and public access. The area is experiencing increasing development pressure which potentially cut off public access to the water. The acquisition of five parcels, in two ownerships along Palomino Beach Lane and West Paradise Harbor Drive, totaling 51 acres at the mouth of Lail Creek is recommended to improve water quality and gain vital public access to the Lake. This acquisition, in tandem with the McGalliard Creek access, gives public access and canoe launches to the south shoreline of Lake Rhodhiss at strategic points.

- **NC 18 at Henry River and Jacobs Fork Canoe/Kayak Access Areas (Burke County)**—Land acquisition along the Henry River and Jacobs Fork on NC 18 serve dual purposes. Land at the bridges over of these two waterways should be acquired to provide canoe/kayak launch sites as part of a paddle trail that along these two rivers which meet at the City of Newton at the confluence of Henry River and Jacobs Fork (forming the South Fork of the Catawba River). The plan for access includes construction of a gravel parking lot that would accommodate approximately five motor vehicles, a canoe/kayak launch site, and a gate to provide some security to the sites. These sites would also benefit water quality.

Many types of efforts can take place that can assist in land acquisitions such as encouraging both public and private efforts to preserve agricultural and open lands through land trusts, open space or conservation easements and fee simple deeds. All jurisdictions should work with property owners to develop conservation easements and other voluntary techniques to preserve land and habitats that are adjacent or fit together with the public lands. Ways to cross reference or further determine if such lands fit into region and local plans include the development of an environmental and land use database with mapping to support environmental planning and development of recreational amenities and to potentially monitor impacts to these resources. Additional efforts should include working with groups such as the Foothills Conservancy and the Catawba Heritage Alliance to acquire up-to-date information about wildlife habitats within the region. Features in the natural environment such as wildlife habitats, threatened species and water quality need to be documented in order to incorporate them into a comprehensive natural environment database. With this type of information available, future land acquisitions can be easily analyzed and incorporated in a comprehensive network of public lands.

5.4 Destination Project and/or Strategy Recommendation

5.4.1 Project/Strategy Overview

This study identifies strategies for maximizing the numerous ways that the natural, cultural and recreation resources can have a positive impact on the local economy. One of the primary goals of this study is to recommend or designate “Destination Project Mega Strategy,” a site or strategy of regional focus that can increase tourism opportunities. **We view this as a proactive economic development approach.**

Originally the project was to develop economic plan alternatives and then present these alternatives for the single “mega project.” Based on that data a final assessment and recommendation of potential “mega-project,” with consideration for potential locations, development strategies and based on economic impact, was to be completed as a part of the final report.

Another aspect of this plan is to consist of an economic development assessment including revenues/expenses and supported by case studies. The economic analysis of the Destination Project Mega Strategy also includes a complete preliminary economic analysis and an evaluation of financial feasibility of the plan alternatives. Furthermore we will examine the direct economic and fiscal impact, such as jobs, wages, tourist spending, taxes on retail sales, hotel rooms, etc.

5.4.2 Development Approach

Interviews of local representatives highlighted generally pragmatic views regarding opportunities for a “mega project,” with discussion focusing on expansion of tourism opportunities, as well as enhancements to the area educational system. Core concerns focused on limited state funding for major capital reinvestment projects, as well as concerns about levels of public subsidy that might be required. Ideas suggested include:

- Development of permanent festival grounds for summer concerts and events.
- An expanded and improved regional signage and wayfinding system.
- Renovation of the old mill town known as “Henry River Mill Village” on Henry River Road off Exit 119/Interstate 40 in eastern Burke County in to a destination attraction, that could offer a mix of tourist shops, along with restaurants, and access to recreational amenities in that area.



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- Funding support for additional sports tournaments.
- Development of a destination resort, with lodging, spa, meeting space, and related amenities.
- Completion of area trail systems currently planned and proposed for the area.
- Development of destination tourist facilities, such as waterparks or amusement parks.
- Attraction of destination retailers, linked to area recreational activities.
- New industrial park and expanded educational opportunities.

In general, the interviews pointed to relevant level of pragmatism regarding the mega project idea, with most respondents being aware of limited state and local funding for major projects.

In many discussions with the Task Force and community leaders, it was essential that this recommendation be something that all jurisdictions can participate and support to develop across the four-county area. It would be very difficult for a county to support development of a specific facility, with potential incentives for instance, in the adjacent county with no direct economic benefit to itself. Certainly links to job creation and retail spending would be evident, but not in terms of tax base creation for example. Therefore individual sites were examined for the best tourism opportunities and were listed as “Second Tier” projects.

For the selected regional destination project mega strategy, the economic impact was assessed by spending patterns by national and local perspectives, direct and indirect impacts (i.e., hotel rooms, food and beverage, merchandise, transportation and entertainment), and current and projected demand factors along with recommendations to implement the strategy.

5.4.3 Regional Perception and Benefit

The interviews highlighted a range of perceptions, issues, and opportunities that will influence this study. The following list highlights salient points identified that stood out after the interview data was put through a filtering process:

- Interviews highlighted varying degrees of relevant concern about the consequences of recent job losses in manufacturing (reported to be about 25,000 positions), due to furniture industry competition with overseas markets. The extent of restructuring is such that current industrial development efforts, while successful, will not be able to replace recent job losses. At the regional level, specific concern was voiced that overseas competition is still impacting area employers, with expectations for additional job losses in furniture related businesses, as the local economy continues its transition from manufacturing to services.
- Within the Greater Hickory Region, interviews highlighted the concentration of employment and commercial activity in Catawba County, where the majority of destination retail, hotel, and employment is located.
- Southern portions of Catawba County are benefiting from residential development linked to proximity to the Charlotte Region. Proximity to Charlotte is significant, with the international airport being only about 45 minutes away. At the same time, the northern reaches of the Hickory Metro area are decidedly rural, with limited access and utilities in place for development.
- Within the context of manufacturing employment decreases, interviews suggested that the Hickory Furniture Mart remains a key destination attraction, supporting a considerable amount of hotel demand, and related retail spending.
- The assessments noted that while there are several significant old manufacturing buildings/sites that are vacant (and unlikely to be re-leased), the area appears to lack a modern business park with prepared sites available for industrial development.



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Interviews suggested that future economic development efforts could be linked to expansion of existing programs:

- Building off of proximity to nationally significant recreation areas, many of which are currently not marketed/promoted to a significant extent.
- Being a gateway to the Smokey Mountains and the Blue Ridge Parkway
- Proximity to Charlotte, Asheville, and Winston Salem
- Evolving second home/retiree housing markets, concentrated in part around Lake James
- Access into the Pisgah National Forest along NC 181 and Old NC 105, with excellent views to Table Rock Mountain.
- Expanded access and use of the Catawba River, which is the one logical link between residents in the region
- Growing existing festivals (summer fiddlers concert) and creating new events
- Continued use of the Hickory Convention Center and a regional supply of about 1,900 hotel rooms
- Linkage to the evolving crafts industry that maturing in communities along the Blue Ridge
- Further development of destination sports tournament facilities
- Further development of local educational resources, including expansion of 4-year university programs.
- The interviews highlighted a key local sensitivity to economic development in recreation relating to the amount of access that is allowed (or physically possible) into the mountainous areas of the four-county market, particularly along the foothills of the Blue Ridge in Burke County.



6.1 Overview and Approach

The economic analysis builds off of aspects of the regional tourism plan for the Hickory Metro Area, to identify economic development implications associated with implementation of key aspects of the plan. The approach focuses specifically on evaluation of an active regional sports network, and a paddle, pedal, and pedestrian trail network. The analysis approach for these concepts relies on:

- Concurrent work evaluating existing visitor amenities and related infrastructure in the Hickory Region, as well as demographic and economic trends.
- An understanding of broader recreational activity trends, as well as related shifts in recreational participation linked to a local population that is growing older at rates faster than US averages.
- Team experience calculating the economic impact of tourist visitation, including the specific impact of sports tournaments, and related benefits of proximity and access to parks and recreation.

More detailed information regarding the two concepts follows.

6.2 Impacts of Recommendations for the Destination Projects and/or Strategies

6.2.1 Tier 1 – Active Regional Sports Network

This program would lead to the creation of a multi-county set of tournament quality sports fields that could support local demand for field sports, as well as provide sufficient capacity to support larger visiting sports tournaments (with 30 to 60 teams, for example), and their economic and fiscal impacts. The team approach includes analysis of two key aspects of this strategy:

1. An estimate of potential resident demand in the Hickory Region for sports fields, including soccer, baseball/softball, and football, based on population by age breakdowns related to sports participation data.
2. An analysis of the economic impact of visiting sports tournaments on a host community, stemming from the arrival of 30 to 60 (or more) teams for a weekend tournament in the region, generating new spending at restaurants, hotels, and retail establishments.



A Sports Complex Example

As envisioned, the approach would build off of existing tournament quality sports fields that have been built at Catawba Meadows and Henry Fork River Regional Recreational Park, allowing the region to gain greater capacity to support larger events.

6.2.1.1 Visiting Tournament Economic Impact

Estimating the economic and fiscal impact of visiting tournaments on a host community begins with the need to understand several critical variables:

- The age group of visiting tournament participants.
- The travel distances involved.
- The size, scale, and history of the tournament in question.

The aforementioned variables impact spending in several critical ways:

- Younger participants (below high school age) are more likely to be accompanied by their parents or close friends, while older participants (high school/college age) are more likely to travel alone.

CHAPTER 6 – ECONOMIC ANALYSIS

Participants above age 25 are increasingly traveling to tournaments as part of broader vacation plans, and are most likely to bring family/spouse along.

- Travel distances correlate with the need for overnight stays and the extent to which overnight stays occur with friends and family or in hotels.
- Participant spending is tied in many ways to the nature and scale of the event, with major tournaments (NCAA Final Four), being located in more expensive destination markets, where a vacation is built around the event, hotel room usage increases, length of stay is extended, and spending increases. Small scale or size tournaments, ranging from state soccer tournaments to regional softball or baseball events, occur in more diverse markets where visitor infrastructure is less robust. As a result, length of stay is shorter and hotel room night penetration is reduced.

The key driver in understanding visitor spending for tournaments relates closely to the ability of the tournament to drive overnight stays in hotels, rather than with friends and family. Hotel accommodation costs represent about 50 percent of daily visitor spending, and therefore have specific impacts on broader economic and fiscal benefits.

To place these above factors into perspective, ERA developed Table 14, which summarizes estimated visitor spending levels at past tournaments around the country. The noted tournaments have been used as benchmarks because the survey approach utilized in each case was sufficiently detailed from ERA's perspective to provide an appropriate benchmark. ERA applied the travel price index (TPI) maintained by

Table 14: Literature Review Spending Patterns

Year	Event	Spending	TPI	In \$ 2005
2002	NCAA Women's Final Four Basketball	\$191.53	112%	\$214.32
2003	Men's South Regional Basketball	\$138.87	109%	\$151.65
2001	NCAA Women's Final Four Basketball	\$130.17	112%	\$145.14
2002	Half Marathon	\$128.61	112%	\$143.91
2001	Junior Olympics	\$104.11	112%	\$116.08
2000	NCAA Wrestling Championship	\$101.10	113%	\$113.94
2003	Senior Olympics	\$103.64	109%	\$113.17
2002	Missouri/Illinois Football Game	\$94.08	112%	\$105.28
2004	San Francisco Grand Prix Cycling Race	\$99.39	105%	\$103.86
2001	CGA Senior Amateur Championships	\$85.28	112%	\$95.09
2001	Cooper River Bridge Run	\$82.22	112%	\$91.68
2001	Soccer Six National Championships	\$68.58	112%	\$76.47
1996	Little Illini Fall Cup Soccer Tournament	\$55.76	131%	\$72.82
2001	Southeast Regional Championship Regatta	\$61.01	112%	\$68.03
2001	Saint Giles Youth Soccer Classic	\$50.54	112%	\$56.35
2001	Palmetto Youth Tennis Championship	\$37.08	112%	\$41.34
2001	NSA Girls Fastpitch World Series	\$22.15	112%	\$24.70

Sources: As noted, Travel Industry Association of America and ERA

the Travel Industrial Association of America to normalize all of the spending patterns to a standard (2005 dollars) figure. The TPI measures the seasonally unadjusted inflation rate of the cost of travel in the United States. After being adjusted for current costs, Table 14 highlights a logical progression of spending commitments based on the level of the tournament, with spending for the Women's Final Four out ranking spending for a youth tennis tournament by a considerable margin. From Table 14, ERA would expect tournament activity in the Hickory area to generate visitor impacts in the \$50 to \$60 per person per day range.

Table 15 summaries visiting tournament activity in Morganton during the summer of 2006. Table 15 highlights a significant number of visiting tournaments, using existing fields as well as the newly built Catawba Meadows facility. Table 15 is important in pointing out that during these tournaments, existing fields are not available for local resident play.

In terms of understanding the impact of four larger scale youth tournaments, ERA developed the following assumptions:

- Four tournaments, each with 60 teams, 15 participants per team, with 1.5 family members per team member.
- A length of stay of 1.8 days.
- Cost of living deflator of 96 percent, based on Charlotte visitor spending of \$58 per person per day.
- All visitors are assumed to be non-local.



CHAPTER 6 – ECONOMIC ANALYSIS

Table 15: Morganton Area Tournament Activity, 2006

Date	Event	Organization	Fields
March 17 to 19	March Madness	BPA Baseball	Old Fields
March 25 to 26	Spring Breakout	AFA Fastpitch	Old Fields
April 1 to 2	April Fastpitch	AFA Fastpitch	Old Fields
April 21 to 23	Spring State Championship	AFA Fastpitch	Old Fields
May 5 to 7	May Day Championship	AFA Fastpitch	Old Fields
May 19 to 21	KFC NIT	USSSA Baseball	Catawba Meadows and All Fields
June 2 to 4	State Championship	Triple Crown Baseball	Catawba Meadows and All Fields
June 2 to 4	State Championship	AFA Fastpitch	Old Fields
June 16 to 18	12U BPA Cooperstown Challenge	BPA Baseball	Catawba Meadows
June 16 to 18	NSA Fastpitch Regional	NSA Fastpitch	Old Fields
June 23 to 25	AFA Regionals (16 to 18)	AFA Fastpitch	Old Fields
June 30 to July 4	World Series 8U, 9U, and 11U	BPA Baseball	Catawba Meadows and All Fields
July 7 to 9	AFA Regionals (8U, 10U, 12U, and 14U)	AFA Fastpitch	Old Fields
July 14 to 16	Pepsi NIT Challenge	USSSA Baseball	Catawba Meadows and All Fields

Source: City of Morganton

Based on these assumptions, four visiting tournaments could generate the following:

- Total Teams: 240
- Total Participants: 3,600
- Total Traveling Friends and Family: 5,400
- Total Visitors: 9,000
- Total Visitor Days: 18,000

Spending implications associated with this level of activity are shown in Table 16, which includes direct visitor spending of about \$900,000 allocated by category, along with an estimate of indirect (or ripple effect) spending generated in other industries due to direct visitor spending. When direct and indirect impacts are combined, Table 16 points to an estimate of about \$1.3 million in total economic activity associated with four visiting tournaments. The indirect impact multipliers are based on ERA experience, derived in part from IMPLAN economic impact modeling software, to reflect the order of magnitude benefit to the region from visitor spending.

Table 16: Direct and Indirect Impact of Four Sports Tournaments, Hickory MSA

Expenditure Category	Per Person/ Per Day	Total Direct Spending	Multiplier	Indirect Spending Impact	Total Spending Impact
Hotel or Motel Rooms	\$18.93	\$307,000	1.42	\$128,940	\$435,940
Food and Beverage	\$16.70	\$271,000	1.49	\$132,790	\$403,790
Retail Stores	\$8.35	\$135,000	1.36	\$48,600	\$183,600
Event Merchandise	\$2.23	\$36,000	1.36	\$12,960	\$48,960
Car Rental	\$1.67	\$27,000	1.50	\$13,500	\$40,500
Other Local Transportation	\$3.34	\$54,000	1.47	\$25,380	\$79,380
Entertainment	\$4.45	\$72,000	1.46	\$33,120	\$105,120
Total	\$55.68	\$902,000		\$395,290	\$1,297,290

Source: ERA

In terms of related employment impacts, the IMPLAN model points to a modest level of job generation that could be associated with the four specified projects. The model estimates a total employment of approximately 18 jobs that could be supported/generated by about \$1.3 million in economic activity.

6.2.1.2 Field Demand and Supply Considerations

The decision to build new facilities at a higher “tournament quality” standard offers relevant benefits, including:

1. The ability to attract and sustain visiting tournaments (and their economic impacts), while allowing for growth in resident (tax paying) participation.
2. The realistic possibility of lower field maintenance costs in the long run, particularly with synthetic surfaces.



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To place field demand and supply in perspective, ERA developed a first cut comparison of current sports field availability in relation to potential demand, based on demographics. Current field supplies are shown in Table 17, along with potential fields. Table 17 highlights an estimated current inventory of 68 prepared fields, which includes 40 baseball/softball diamonds, 24 soccer fields, and four football/soccer fields. The most current project is in Morganton, called Catawba Meadows, which includes five baseball diamonds, with expansion room for four additional softball diamonds.

Table 17: Estimated Current Field Inventory, Defined Region

Jurisdiction	Complex	Soccer	Baseball/ Softball	Football/ Multipurpose	Total
Alexander	Dusty Ridge		4		4
	East Park		3	1	4
	Salem	1	1		2
Burke	Reep Park		4	2	6
	Spring Park		2		2
	Glen Alpine Park		3	1	4
Hickory	Stanford		3		3
	Kiwanis		4		4
	Neill Clark	4			4
	Henry Fork	8			8
Lenoir	LP Frans		1		1
	Mulberry		3		3
	Soccer Complex	8	1		9
Morganton	Old Lenoir High	1			1
	Catawba Meadows		5		5
	Shuey Field		2		2
	Gene Turner		2		2
Newton	Catawba River	2			2
	Northside		2		2
Current Total		24	40	4	68

Note: This analysis does not include fields associated with educational facilities such as high schools, colleges, and universities which could be used with program agreements signed with those organizations.

There are existing fields in the region which are unaccounted for in this inventory. These were not included due ownership in non-profit or private organizations (such as the YMCA), service clubs (Ruritan and Optimist), school districts and smaller towns. An analysis for their condition should be completed and cooperative agreements should be developed for use of these fields.

Table 18 summarizes proposed fields in the area, noting a potential for 13 additional fields.

Table 18: Proposed Field Development

Jurisdiction	Complex	Soccer	Baseball/ Softball	Football/ Soccer	Total
Alexander	Dusty Ridge			1	1
Hickory	Stanford				0
Lenoir	Soccer Complex	1			1
Morganton	Catawba Meadows		4		4
Morganton	Cat River	2			2
Newton	Jacob Fork	2	3		5
Potential Total		5	7	1	13

6.2.1.3 Current Field Demand Factors

To estimate demand, ERA used data from the National Sporting Goods Association (NSGA) and demographic data to calculate the overall demand for the market. The NSGA conducts an annual survey to measure participation rates for over 30 types of sports and activities.

Table 19: National Participation Rates—Selected Sports

Sport	1994	1999	2002	2004	CAGR
Baseball	6.5%	6.4%	6.2%	6.1%	-0.6%
Soccer	5.4%	5.2%	5.7%	5.1%	-0.6%
Softball	7.8%	5.8%	5.4%	4.8%	-4.7%
Football	6.7%	4.9%	4.0%	7.0%	0.4%

Sources: NSGA and ERA

Participation rates are calculated on national and regional level, by age, income and gender. The data used to estimate market demand is from the 2004 survey, the most recent one published. Table 19 lists selected sports, ranked by participation rates (the percentage of population participating in the sport). In 1994, softball had a participation of approximately 7.8 percent while the soccer participation rate was 5.4 percent. More recently, the soccer participation rate decreased to 5.1 percent while softball



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decreased to 4.8 percent. As the baby boomer generation ages, participation rates for softball are expected to decrease, further. Participation rates for football are the average of touch and tackle versions.

Regarding Table 19: National Participation Rates, ERA notes several key details. First, the noted changes in participation do not correlate with demand for visiting tournaments (and spending), which national studies and ERA reviews have shown to be increasing in size within the past five years. Second, participation rates should be viewed in terms of the population of people in specific age groups that are likely to participate, as well as their gender. Third, the participation fluctuations reflect the reality that participation in field sports will vary from year to year and decade to decade, based on which professional sport is popular, and a host of related factors, including limited free time and the economy.

The NSGA survey measures the frequency of play for each sport by age and gender and estimates the average number of days people participate in each sport, for the population aged seven and older.

Assuming that each person plays once a day, then the average number of participation days is equivalent to the average number of times (outings). For an example, 100 people playing a sport once per year is equivalent to the number of outings of one person playing a sport 100 times per year. Applying statewide participation rates and average number of days (outings) played to market area population, ERA estimated the number of outings in the market area for each of the following sports: baseball, soccer, softball and football. Results are shown in Table 20.

Table 20: Estimated Outings

Sport	Participation Rate	Mean Days Per Year	Market Area Population	Estimated Market Outings
Baseball	5.60%	37.53	345,590	726,320
Soccer	5.00%	42.19	345,590	729,022
Softball	4.40%	30.90	345,590	469,864
Football	3.35%	39.31	345,590	455,102

Sources: NSGA and ERA

The above assessment would point to potential demand for up to 726,300 baseball outings, about 730,000 soccer outings, 469,800 softball outings, and 455,100 football outings. As Table 20 excludes participant demand below age seven, the impact of smaller “mini” field sizes is significantly reduced.

6.2.1.4 Gender

Male players represent the majority football and baseball play where roughly eight out of ten players are male. Softball is about evenly split and out of ten soccer players, four are female. Soccer is increasingly popular among women as more women’s soccer is shown on national television. The strong international presence of the US women’s team has also been a factor in growing participation among young female players.

6.2.1.5 Age

In general, participation rates for field sports decrease with age as players focus on the sports that fit their lifestyles best. Soccer is popular among children under 17 years old. The youngest age group (7 to 11 years old) has a participation rate of 28 percent, the 12 to 17 year old age group a rate of 14 percent and the 18 to 24 year old age group a rate of 5 percent. Soccer is also popular among children under 7 years of age; however, the NSGA does not report data for this age group. Baseball participation rates also decrease rapidly with age. The participation rate for the 7 to 11 year old age group is 22 percent and is 16 percent for the 12 to 17 year old age group. Softball has lower participation rates compared to the other field sports.

6.2.1.6 Income

In general, participation rates increase with income levels. Households with an average annual income over \$50,000 registered higher participation rates in all field sports. Baseball maintains a higher participation rate compared to other field sports between income levels of \$25,000 to \$74,000. Participation rates for football tend to have minimal variation with different income levels. By applying the North Carolina specific participation rates and number of outings to the market size, income, region, and age factors for the Hickory, ERA estimated the number of hours of potential field time activity.



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6.2.1.7 Field Time Demand Assumptions

Estimates of field demand reflect an approach which balances all of the above factors, including market size, income, age, and gender factors to arrive at an overall demand factor. The approach assumes that, for each sport, two teams demand an average of two hours per game, and that the number of players per game is estimated at 30 for soccer and football, 26 for baseball and 24 for softball. Given these factors, ERA estimates that the market area’s population currently supports about 53,500 hours of baseball, 42,900 hours of soccer, 43,000 hours of softball and 26,800 hours of football.

In interpreting Table 21, it is important to note that the field demand estimates correlate demand with a regulation field size for each noted sport. This assumption will slightly overstate soccer demand for the seven to 11 age group, as a share of potential participants are more likely to play soccer on a regulation field that has been sub-divided in to two to three smaller fields. As the study excludes participants below age seven, the impact of this factor is considered modest by ERA.

Table 21: Hickory Annual Field Time Demand Estimates—Hours Demanded

Method	Baseball	Soccer	Softball	Football
Market Size	55,871	48,601	39,155	30,340
Income	64,362	39,743	55,825	26,718
Region	44,329	43,296	35,423	29,786
Age	49,418	39,972	41,512	20,396
Average	53,495	42,903	42,979	26,810

Sources: US Census, NSGA, and ERA

6.2.1.8 Field Supply Factors

The approach then compares current hours demanded to current field supply, calculated in terms of hours of playable time per field. Hours of playable time include adjustments to account for weather

in North Carolina, seasonal field use (concentrated in spring and fall), and related factors, such as maintenance time. The hours of playable time factor represents a measure of average capacity per field. Tables 22 and 23 highlight current and potential field capacity factors for the Hickory Area. Table 22 summaries capacity factors for existing fields, pointing to about 58,600 hours of play for baseball and softball, 28,872 hours for soccer, and about 5,500 for football and multipurpose fields.

Table 22: Current Field Capacity Estimate, Hours of Use

Sport	Current Inventory	Hours Per Field	Hours of Play
Baseball and Softball	40	1,466	58,640
Soccer	24	1,203	28,872
Football and Multipurpose	4	1,385	5,540

Sources: US Census, NSGA, and ERA

Table 23 highlights potential field capacity factors, assuming that all proposed fields are built as well. Growth in field capacity is consistent with plans for additional baseball and soccer fields.

Table 23: Potential Field Capacity, Hours of Use

Sport	Current and Potential Inventory	Hours Per Field	Hours of Play
Baseball and Softball	47	1,466	68,902
Soccer	29	1,203	34,887
Football and Multipurpose	5	1,385	6,925

Sources: US Census, NSGA, and ERA

When current field capacity and demand factors are compared (see Table 24) there appears to be a relevant amount of potential unmet demand, with a need for 26 new baseball softball fields, 15 soccer fields, and 14 football/multipurpose fields.

Table 24: Field Demand and Supply Comparison, Current Inventory

Sport	Current Demand	Existing Capacity	Unmet Demand	Current Field Demand Implications
Baseball and Softball	96,474	58,640	-37,834	26
Soccer	42,903	25,263	-17,640	15
Football and Multipurpose	26,810	6,925	-19,885	14

Sources: US Census, NSGA, and ERA

Using the same current demand factors applied to currently proposed additions to field supply, Table 25 shows that currently planned additions to softball and baseball capacity will significantly reduce unmet demand. At the same time, field increases for soccer and football will still be insufficient to offset potential demand.

Table 25: Field Demand and Supply Comparison, Future Inventory

Sport	Current Demand	Future Capacity	Unmet Demand	Current Field Demand Implications
Baseball and Softball	96,474	68,902	-18,980	18
Soccer	42,903	34,887	-12,640	12
Football and Multipurpose	26,810	6,925	-19,885	14

Sources: US Census, NSGA, and ERA



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The above field demand and capacity comparisons should be kept in perspective, for the following reasons:

- The local demand estimates do not include hours of field usage allocated to tournaments. As previous tables have shown, visiting tournaments take up a relevant amount of core season field time in the spring and fall.
- Across the country there is never sufficient funding for the public sector to fully meet demand for recreation. As such, there will always be unmet demand.
- Given the realities of terrain in the Hickory area, it will always be more expensive to find and develop new public recreation facilities. As in many cases, available sites are impacted by floodplains, topography and wetlands, site development will remain complex and expensive compared to other markets.
- The extent of unmet demand combined with realistic limits on public investment capabilities for new fields, means that there should be a role for the private sector to play in participating to develop new facilities.
- Opportunity costs associated with not going ahead with additional tournament quality fields relate to the increased difficulty in supporting larger destination tournaments. While Catawba Meadows has room for additional expansion, it is not clear if that venue can support a 5-day woman's softball tournament with 50 visiting teams alone. Tournaments with more than 50 teams will generate needs for fields at multiple locations. As well, these larger tournaments pull from regional and national markets, typically with longer lengths of stay.

The economic impact analysis highlighted a benefit of about \$1.3 million in direct and indirect economic activity generated by four potential sports tournaments, for an average benefit of about \$330,000 per event. As noted before, impact potentials vary considerably based on the age group of the event and ERA chose a conservative approach in this situation.

Looking at tournament quality fields from a cost benefit perspective can not clearly answer the question if these new fields will pay for their development. First construction and land acquisition costs were not completed as a part of this study. Whereas, some construction costs can be determined as a fixed cost, like placing sod on a field, others such as site dependent such as grading in rock outcropping are present. Land acquisition is also site dependent and includes factors such as location and topography. ERA experience shows that for most communities, the economic benefit of building tournament quality fields is a key argument for funding upgrades to existing/planned fields to "tournament quality" standards. As the majority of users of "tournament quality" fields are in fact local tax paying residents, using the benefit of economic impact allows park planners to build better quality facilities, which last longer and have lower maintenance costs. Local residents are then presented with the opportunity for better quality fields, with the understanding that during several key weekends per year, these new fields will not be available for local resident play. ERA's market analysis highlighted the potential level of unmet local demand for sports fields in the Hickory Region, as a key argument for why additional fields could be justified.

6.2.2 Tier 1 – Paddle, Pedal, and Pedestrian Trail Network

This program focuses on an aggressive effort to link the existing array of existing and proposed trail networks into an organized program that would be of sufficient scale to attract incremental tourist visitation. Nationally, the development of extensive, destination-quality trail systems has been a cornerstone of development in places across the country. National research has highlighted numerous benefits associated with development of regional trail systems. Benefits are economic and fiscal, property value related, and health related. As trail use grows and more trails are developed near population centers, communities are recognizing the economic, social and health benefits of trails and hiking¹. As stated by the Speaker of the West Virginia House of Delegates. "From small businesses centered around our recreation and tourism to science and technology jobs helping to restore our environment, we are beginning to see tangible economic development as a direct result of improved

¹American Hiking Society, "Economic Benefits of Trails—Fact Sheet" <http://www.americanhiking.org/>, Feb., 2004.



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stewardship of our resources,”² An organized trail system is a desirable amenity and can contribute to the economical vitality of the community. A trail can guide both visitors and residents through diverse neighborhoods, past interesting shops, enticing restaurants, and many other businesses in downtown areas. Revenue generated from trail related recreation and sports activities provide substantial income and employment opportunities.³ Examples of these benefits are as follows:

6.2.2.1 Economic Benefits

Hiking and outdoor recreation is a booming business. The leisure industry today, at \$311 billion annually, is almost the size of Australia's gross national product. In 15 years, consumer spending on recreation and entertainment has increased from 6.5 percent of total consumer spending to 10.5. Since 1977, visitors to National Park units have increased by 30 percent. And in the seven years prior to 1994, the number of USDA Forest Service campsites grew by 9.2 percent to accommodate the burgeoning interest in hiking and camping. By the year 2050, the number of people backpacking is expected to increase 26 percent.⁴

Numerous impact studies have been commissioned to evaluate the economic and fiscal benefits of trail systems. Recent studies have been completed in several markets relevant to the local situation:

Allegheny Trail Alliance—In 2002, the alliance worked with the University of Pittsburgh to survey trail users and spending factors throughout their extensive trail system, covering more than 30 miles within a 5-county area (includes Allegheny, Westmoreland, Somerset, Fayette, and Washington Counties). The survey generated 2,230 responses for a 39 percent response rate. The survey approach pointed to average daily trail usage of about 150 people per day; when extended over a 214 day season, the approach yielded annual attendance of about 345,000 visits, with a majority of visits covering about 11 miles of trail, over a three hour experience. The study highlighted several additional factors:

- **Direct Trail Related Spending**—Each visitor was estimated to spend between \$8 and \$10 per day on local goods and services, for a seasonal direct spending benefit of between \$2.8 and \$3.3 million in retail spending.
- **Additional Bike and Equipment Spending**—Between \$2.9 million and \$4.2 million
- **Age**—Core trail users are older than age 31, with an average age of 41.
- **Overnight Accommodations**—Thirteen percent of users stayed overnight in the area before or after use of trails, with estimated hotel room revenue estimated between \$340,000 and \$700,000 per season.
- In total, trail usage is correlated with an overall direct benefit of about \$7.2 million per year.

Virginia Creeper Trail—Located in the southwestern corner of the state, the Creeper Trail covers about 34 miles, with a key trailhead in Damascus, which is reportedly referred to as “Trail Town USA”, to the fact that 5 major trail systems intersect in the community. The impact of the trail was evaluated based on a survey approach, mirrored with trail count estimates. The analysis highlighted several results:

- About 130,000 visits (winter and summer), with about 47 percent being non-local, generating about 18,000 overnight stays.
- About \$1.6 million in total economic output.

Blaine County, Idaho—A May 2001 study of visitor impact in near the Salmon River, indicated that the impact of visitor spending was the creation of 5,980 jobs and \$120 million in income in the single county.⁵

²Robert Chambers, Speaker West Virginia House of Delegates, From “Green Jobs” Speech to the West Virginia House of Delegates, February 21, 1995.

³Barthlow, Kelly, Moore, Roger, *The Economic Impacts and Uses of Long-Distance Trails*, The National Park Service, 1998, page 49.

⁴English, Donald, et. al., *Regional Demand and Supply Projection for Outdoor Recreation*, USDA Forest Service, Southeastern Forest Experiment Station, GA, June 2000.

⁵Dean Runyon Associates. *Economic Analysis of Blaine County, May 2001*.



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The Washington State Trails Plan estimated that trail users in the state of Washington have an estimated equipment investment of over \$3.4 billion which generates tax revenues of \$13.8 to \$27.6 million.⁶

Although all the visitors to the trails just mentioned may not be hikers, well-managed trails running through communities can foster substantial, sustainable economic activity through business development and tourism. Key trail head locations within the trail network can also emerge as niche retail and restaurant destinations, anchored by businesses that serve trail users. Trails encourage the establishment of “clean” industries and businesses such as cafes, bike shops, and bed & breakfasts in communities along the trail.⁷

6.2.2.2 Property Value Enhancement

Greenbelts and trail systems are long narrow green spaces provided to enhance the natural beauty of an area. Many greenbelts were created from former railroad lines that had fallen into disrepair. Park planners took these difficult spaces and created useable space that frequently includes hiking or biking paths. As with all forms of parks, communities want the benefits to outweigh the cost of building and maintaining park land. In response, scholars have studied the effect of greenbelts with numerous analysis techniques. Many areas have taken a simple survey approach to determine the value of a greenbelt to nearby home owners. Unfortunately this analytical method does not provide clear and quantifiable benefits. One study, now underway at the Center for Urban Policy and Environment at Indiana University, is looking at the impact on land values based on proximity to green ways in the Indianapolis market. Their research highlights a complicated relationship between land value and proximity to greenways, with analysis based on MLS real estate sales data analyzed in a GIS format pointing to a number of initial conclusions. Research suggests that proximity can generate a premium of 11 percent in value over the average price for homes across Indianapolis.

In a survey of metro-Denver real estate agents, 73 percent of the agents believed a home near a trail would be easier to sell. A survey of homeowners living adjacent to a trail showed 29 percent felt their property value would increase and 57 percent felt their home would sell more quickly because of the trailside location. Furthermore, 29 percent were influenced by the proximity of a trail in buying their home, and 17 percent of renters were influenced by the presence of a trail.⁸

Studies in other regions have substantiated the Denver findings. For example, Seattle’s Burke-Gilman Trail has increased the value of homes near the trail by 6.5 percent.⁹ In another study of two rail-trails in Minnesota, 87 percent of landowners surveyed believed the trails had no negative impact on the value of their property.¹⁰

A survey of property values near greenbelts in Boulder, Colorado, noted that housing prices declined an average of \$4.20 for each foot of distance away from a greenbelt for up to two-thirds of a mile. In one neighborhood, this figure was \$10.20 per foot. The same study concluded that the average value of a home adjacent to the greenbelt would be 32 percent higher than the same property 3,200 feet from the greenbelt.¹¹

6.2.2.3 Health Benefits

Numerous studies have estimated the relationship between public costs and public benefits associated with trail systems. One study looked at the extensive trail system in Lincoln, Nebraska, evaluating public costs of building and maintaining the system in relation to public health benefits. The assessment looked at health benefits in terms of costs for medical services for people who exercise a minimum of 30

⁶Barthlow, Moore, page 49.

⁷Greenways Incorporated, *Transportation Potential and Other Benefits of Off-Road Bicycle and Pedestrian Facilities (for FHWA)*, Washington, DC, 1992, page 17.

⁸The Conservation Fund and Colorado State Parks State Trails Program, *The Effect of Greenways on Property, Values and Public Safety*, Colorado, 1995, pages 6 and 7.

⁹Greenways Incorporated, page 21.

¹⁰Moore, Roger L., *The Economic Impacts of Long-Distance Trails: A Review of Related Literature*, Parks, Recreation and Tourism Management, North Carolina State University, May, 1996, page 33.

¹¹*Ibid*, page 21.



minutes of activity at least three times per week versus people who are more sedentary. When cost savings associated with noted levels of exercise are compared with public costs of providing access to trails, benefits outweighed costs by a minimum of 65 percent, using a conservative cost basis.

A National Park Service study compared people who lead sedentary lifestyles to those who exercise regularly (few times per week). The exercisers filed 14 percent fewer healthcare claims, spent 30 percent fewer days in the hospital, and had 41 percent fewer claims greater than \$5,000.¹² For example; 1.5 million fractures each year associated with osteoporosis result in \$6 billion in medical care costs. Through exercise such as hiking, bones actually gain mass, slowing the process of osteoporosis, which in turn could lead to fewer fractures and much lower medical costs.¹³

Be Active North Carolina, a non-profit organization dedicated to improving the health of all North Carolinians, sites unhealthy lifestyles cost the North Carolina economy \$24 billion dollars annually. The anticipated benefits of increased participation in physical fitness include reductions in both the direct and indirect costs of illness and disease, improvement in lifestyle, and a reduction in geriatric costs.¹⁴

6.2.3 Marketing and Benefits

The overall approach begins with identification of core regional destinations that will serve as the anchor for the region's growing tourist base. Tier 1 projects could include:

6.2.3.1 Tier 1 – Active Regional Sports Network

Presently the two major sports complexes in the region include the Catawba Meadows Sports Complex in Morganton for baseball and softball and the Henry Fork River Regional Recreation Park Hickory designed primarily for soccer. These are excellent resources and offer opportunities for regional tournaments in association with other fields in the area. However the total numbers of fields do not meet present demand. In other regions smaller towns host large-scale tournaments (100 to 200 teams for example) and use fields across a wide ranging area, sometimes requiring trips of an hour or more between fields.

With a coordinated regional network of fields, the region will be able to host larger scale tournaments, attracting more tourists to the region. The key in developing such as network will be for each jurisdiction to network with those supervisors and department heads to list, schedule field use and similar facilities during tournaments. Fields used in the Greater Hickory Region will be within a 30-minute drive between facilities. This further exposes the more of the region to tournaments participants as well.

Additional benefits include the construction costs, maintenance cost, and personnel being divided between the participating jurisdictions. Naturally new fields are necessary to accomplish this endeavor with funds for land acquisition and development needed. However, with a coordinated effort between regional jurisdictions, further partnerships can develop as well.

- Linked program of tournament quality sports fields
- Larger regional/national tournaments are a significant impact generator, with overnight stays

6.2.3.2 Tier 1 – Paddle, Pedal, and Pedestrian Trail Network

As we have discussed previously in the plan, a connected trail network offers an alternative transportation network throughout the region. This effort also acts to add a network for physical activity where ultimately citizens will be able to travel from place to place and gain exercise, rather than having to drive to a specific walking track for such exercise. The regional trail network is a creative and cost-effective infrastructure of multipurposed trails that utilizes various corridors and connects parks, schools, urban areas, commercial areas and other community amenities.

¹²Greenways Incorporated, page 14.

¹³Burke, Edmund R., PhD, *Benefits of Bicycling and Walking to Health (for FHWA)*, Washington, DC, 1992, page 13.

¹⁴*Ibid*, page 16.



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There are many opportunities to consider in the development of the PPP trail network. First of all, regional jurisdictions should consider the inclusion of bikeways and pedestrian trails in the planning for all transportation and capital improvement projects and seek funding for the construction of these facilities from both public and private sources. The development of a corridor classification system in conjunction with the transportation development that establishes different design requirements for specific trail functions. The system should include all corridor uses and include multi-use, single-use, recreational, pedestrian and/or other defined uses.

Access points should be provided at park locations, or other public facilities including schools, libraries, municipal offices, as well as businesses. The PPP trail network access points should have convenient parking (shared or independent), shelters, and other facilities to promote use of the trail system. Bicycle racks should also be provided in the downtowns and other commercial and major use areas to increase convenience for cyclists.



Trail Connection

Communities that offer this type of organized trail system benefit by attracting new development and residents who recognize the importance of the recreation and environmental stewardship. This in turn leads to new investment and adds to the economic transition occurring in our region. The regional trail system as proposed, the PPP, is a comprehensive one. Because it extends through existing parks and connects them with other trail systems and regional communities, the system will only be possible through partnerships with public, private landowners, interest groups, business and governments. As we have seen in other communities that were used as benchmark comparisons, the economic benefits include increased property values with close proximity to the greenways, increased tourism attraction and environmental enhancement.

- Catawba River is the spine on which all area attractions are based—core of the strategy

6.2.3.3 Tier 2 Projects

Tier 2 projects are those which are site specific and have regional economic importance. Second Tier projects include:

- **Lake James Lodge**—Crescent Resources has reserved land for a potential resort lodge to be developed on Lake James surrounded by the newly expanded Lake James State Park. This potential project offers an exceptional development opportunity to create a unique facility built in the Adirondack style and taking full advantage of the setting on Lake James at the base of the Linville Gorge. These types of facilities with easy access with natural and cultural resources in close proximity have been a drawing card for tourists for many years and their popularity have recently been increasing.
 - Potential to be a key destination anchor for the region
 - Proximity to Charlotte region/international airport
 - Overnight stays drive growth in hotel/visitor taxes
 - Linkage with South Mountain State Park expansion
- **Destination Outfitter/Outdoor Facility**—Taking advantage of the proximity of Interstate 40, the mountains and lakes, a large-scale retail outfitter should be actively recruited to build in the region. In conjunction with being a retail economic draw, an associated outdoor facility should be included for store employees to demonstrate and hold classes on the various products, patrons to try their purchases and overall public use. Outdoor facility options can include a pond to demonstrate casting, canoe and kayak products; a shooting range for firearms and bow hunting; climbing and mountain biking areas.
 - Pull new sales dollars into the host region.



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- Linkage with outdoor facilities and programming allows for overnight trip generation.
- **Foothills Festival**—This is the proposal offered by the Preservation Event Partnership for a summer long multiple-event “festival” with many coordinated opportunities for tourist attraction and activity. Recently a feasibility study has been completed and discussions are in the works for the events to begin in 2007. The project coordinators are working with local jurisdictions and other event planners to work in conjunction with organized events and offering new opportunities.
 - Has potential to expand tourist offerings, providing visitors within 2.5 hours more reasons to visit.
 - Importantly, this concept should be one of multiple festivals planned in the region (not the only one).
- **Yadkin Valley Equestrian Center**—This potential destination takes advantage of two important resources within the Yadkin Valley in northern Caldwell County. Patterson School and the Patterson Preserve have an existing horse barn stables with fenced pastures along with 1100 acres available for horse trails and cabins. Adjacent to this historic school are the Buffalo Gamelands having more than 3000 acres of undeveloped lands within the Yadkin Valley. Having ample amount of land is key to develop trails and attracting equestrian users. In many cases areas available to horse offer limited trail possibilities simply because there is not enough lands to accommodate daylong rides. For example, the Moses Cone Estate on the Blue Ridge Parkway close to Blowing Rock attracts equestrian users from more than two hours away because ample land to make loading horses and trailering to a resource worth-while. In combining these two facilities, land becomes adequate to attract equine users. Additionally, Guard Hall on the Patterson School campus is an historic structure and officials at the school have been developing plans to renovate the facility and turn it into an arts and cultural center showcasing the folk arts of the region and can also become an additional draw for tourist.
 - Opportunities to expand equestrian base in the region—more than 5000 acres
 - Ability to further diversify the base of local attractions
 - Equestrian business can become a key impact generator
- **Foothills Living History**—Capitalizing on the abundant historical resources in the Greater Hickory Region is a unique opportunity. From the local museums, built structures, folk and cultural festivals a network that showcase the regional opportunities and history trails can be developed. Every jurisdiction in the region has a past with a story to tell. Itineraries can be developed for tourist to “walk back in time” and experience the regions history. Re-enactments from historical events to daily living can occur as part of festivals and celebrations, some of which are presently happening, but increased through a coordinated marketing effort.
 - Linkage to Catawba River, and other regional attractions
 - Helpful in broadening visitor length of stay
- **Rocky Face Climbing and Recreational Center**—Rocky Face is a unique resource located in northern Alexander County. A former mine has left an escarpment into a mountainside. Development plans have been completed to open a rock climbing and hiking center with extensive trails and an interpretative center, however funding has not been forthcoming. The trail system and topography lend itself to the development of an ideal recreational area. Further evaluation must take place to



Guard Hall at Patterson School



Rocky Face



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examine the realistic potential of all future activities. Discussions to develop this as a state park have been limited due to the limited amount of land, however if two adjacent large parcels could be acquired, that potential will become more feasible.

- Potentials to diversify visitor base, support educational programs, and regional climbing tournaments
- **Lake Rhodhiss Boating and Water Center**—Lake Rhodhiss presently has limited development and public access. A boating and water access center opportunity can take advantage of the natural shoreline and scenery, but close in proximity to goods and services. Across the region too, substantial public access to the water is limited. In this proposal, a water access environment could be established where a large protected public swimming area is established in combination with a boat rental facility offering kayaks, canoes, paddleboats and even potentially houseboats for multi-day rental.
 - Part of effort to broaden base of area attractions.
 - Large area public access to water attracting local use.
 - Expand boating use and opportunities.
- **Boone Fork Recreation Area**—This 5000-acre resource offers hiking and equestrian trails, primitive camping facilities and a fishing pond. Working in conjunction with the state forestry service, this area will accommodate limited recreational development to include new opportunities such as mountain biking and disk golf for example. Access must be improved to US 321 to attract users to this large-scale resource.
 - Improvements in this area will increase visitor base and further diversify resources.
 - Improved access from US321 is essential to direct visitors to site
 - Opportunities to expand equestrian, mountain biking and hiking base in the region

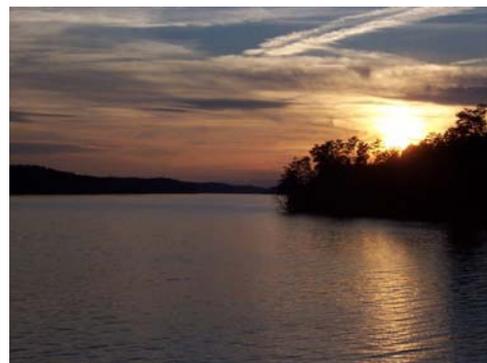


Fishing Pond at Boone Fork Recreation Area

6.2.4 Destination Projects Recommendations

Core strategy elements are meant to correct a key issue, which is that **since 1990, 4-county per capita tourist spending has grown at 0.66 percent per year against a state average of 3.3 percent per year**. The following are recommended to increase this statistic.

- Development of a streamlined 4-county marketing effort.
- Initial focus on identified Tier 1 destination projects.
- Development of standard signage and wayfinding systems, to tie the region together as one destination.
- Assessment of hotel/motel tax rates and abilities to generate additional funding, tied to growth in attractions.
- Regional strategy and benefit:
 - Increase the base of tourist attractions
 - Broaden the market of potential visitors, and their length of stay
 - Boost per capita tourist spending and rate of growth.



Sunset from Lakeview Park



7.1 Regional Management and Organization

Achieving the recommendations outlined in this study will take time. As new opportunities, information and challenges appear, the shape of the proposed system could change. The process will require innovation, partnership and cooperation. The strategies need to be flexible, yet remain focused because over the long term, the process will be impacted by changing circumstance, economic conditions, political direction and other emerging opportunities.

One of the most difficult tasks in developing a regional organization with regulatory powers is the regional management and organization of the leadership team. A combination of different service organizations, chambers of commerce, convention visitor's bureaus, non-profit and volunteer organizations, economic development commissions, private industry, local jurisdictions, and departments within the 28 local governments are involved in the Greater Hickory Region and the transition to increase recreation based tourism options. Therefore there are many different opinions of who is the "Lead Organization."

First and foremost, it is imperative that all of these different participants be linked or networked through a common database to assist visitors with their inquiries. The region is too connected not to help one another. When tourists come into a new area to visit, they should be able to get information handed to them about the four-county area and not on a single county or community's resources. Information received in Burke or Caldwell County should be the same as information received in Catawba or Alexander counties. Furthermore, specific information could be further broken down in to areas of interests for the visitor and given in printed or digital form. New forms of information distribution makes this much easier than it had in the past by using the internet, CD with video brochures and database information and "podcasting" with downloadable data to the potential visitor.

The region is fortunate to be in close proximity to Lenoir Rhyne College and the Tom Reese School for Environment Science. Being able to work directly with the faculty and students within this school allows collaborative efforts for mutual benefits. Other similar universities and colleges offer environmental studies and these resources should be tapped for their creativity and conservation designs. These include the Center for the Environment at Catawba College, Appalachian State University, Western Carolina University as well as the Centralina COG's Sustainable Environment for QOL project.

Presently the WPCOG Open Space Task Force has taken the leadership role in developing ideas, plans and projects to further the regions commitment to the environment, preserving open space and increasing recreation based tourism options. However this task force has no authoritative power to implement regional initiatives or access/distribute funds for such.

One similar regional based board that has worked very well to link participant's interests is the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) and their responsibilities lead the transportation planning efforts. This board consists of two committees; one of elected officials (TAC), the other of technical positions (TCC). Each jurisdiction in the region has members which serve on each board, with the TCC reviewing plans and necessary improvements and the TAC reviewing those proposals and setting priorities for improvement projects.

It is very important that this leadership role be discussed and a solution be implemented. It is our recommendation that a leadership board, similar to the MPO be chosen. This organizational arrangement gives each community an equitable role in making decisions in project/program development and funding.

7.2 Implementation Strategies and Funding Potentials

The following section outlines the cost to implement the recommendations of the Greater Hickory Recreation/Tourism Plan and is itemized by the primary strategy, direct costs, necessary action item(s), and timeframe. It is also recommended that these items be prioritized by the Task Force and reviewed as part of an ongoing annual audit and strategic plan.



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- **Define a Leadership Group or Organization:**

Direct Costs—\$0.00

- **Action**—Near term; this should be one of the first steps taken to establish the Task Force as an administrative board with decision making authority and true regional representation. Goals and objectives must be established for ranking projects and determining how future potential funding is dispersed

- **Linked and Networked Database:**

Direct Costs—\$0.00

- **Action**—Near term; all Chambers of Commerce, Convention Visitor Bureaus, and other visitors contact groups should develop a plan of action to coordinate all information for the region and distribute as appropriate.
- **Action**—Long term; study the feasibility to establish information kiosks in strategic locations throughout the region.

- **Develop a Marketing Plan, Wayfinding, and Branding Package:**

Direct Costs—Undetermined; to be determined once scope of marketing plan is established.

- **Action**—Near term; develop strategic tasks for creating a marketing plan that encompasses wayfinding, branding and image identity for the region. Decide if the “10 Minutes from Urban to Wilderness” theme is the preferred direction.
- **Action**—Mid-term; establish a Request for Proposals to distribute to marketing firms to develop a comprehensive regional marketing plan.

- **Website and Inventory Map Database:**

Direct Costs—\$0.00 for in-house development; \$30,000 to \$60,000 if website development is outsourced; less than \$1,000 per month for annual maintenance; an RFP should be developed or included as part of the comprehensive regional marketing plan.

- **Action**—Near term; website establishment is in its early development stages at this time. The Task Force should continue this effort with input from all stakeholders based on the information and recommendations contained within this and other local plans.
- **Action**—Mid-term; transition the Inventory Map into an internet power tool that takes digital location mapping data and links it to other databases — by clicking on a resource, a detailed webpage is opened to associated information and references that further delineate information or tasks for the user (see plan recommendation).
- **Action**—Long term; redesign and coordinate a new website based on the “Branding” developed within the comprehensive regional marketing plan.

- **Work Directly with Lenoir Rhyne and other regional colleges:**

Direct Cost—\$0.00

- **Action**—Mid-term: establish relationships with regional colleges and universities to build partnership arrangements for projects, which could be made part of a course curriculum or independent studies program.

- **Sponsor a Professional:**

Direct Cost—\$5,000 and above

- **Action**—Mid-term; sponsor a professional correspondent/journalist to visit the area and participate in an event in their specialty—with the understanding that an article or related documentation would be published in a national publication or media outlet.

- **Identify “Themed” Trails:**

Direct Cost—\$2,500 and above

- **Action**—Mid-term to Long Term; the Task Force should review trails within particular areas and establish themes for attracting certain user groups. An example is the bird watching check list and habitat brochure for trails at Riverbend Park in Catawba County. Adding signage and printed materials that is coordinated with the “Branding” developed in the marketing plan for region. This type of coordination can provide added links to state and national initiatives.



- **Water Quality Recommendations:**

Direct Cost—Undetermined; most recommendations can be completed with \$0.00.

- **Action**—Ongoing; most of the plan recommendations include references to establishing and implementing standards or best management practices, and coordinating them with outside agencies. However, in particular cases, funds may need to be attached to projects in order to obtain corridor and buffer easements.

- **Land Acquisition Recommendations:**

Direct Cost—Undetermined

- **Action**—Long term; detailed studies and appraisals must be performed on each area recommended for acquisition to determine specific value and appropriate acquisition methods. Land Acquisition costs include items beyond the purchase price of land they should include fees for property appraisers, attorneys, surveyors and other related professional services.

- **Sports Field Network:**

Direct Cost—\$0.00 for networking; undetermined for future field development.

- **Action**—Near term; establish a comprehensive database of sports fields throughout the region that links all recreation departments and then allows coordinated field use and recruitment of potential tournaments or events
- **Action**—Long term; develop a plan of action to acquire land, design complexes and construct future fields necessary to recruit large scale tournaments.

- **Paddle-Pedal-Pedestrian Trail Network:**

Direct Cost—Undetermined; general greenway development costs are included within the plan.

- **Action**—Near term; perform detail route coordination with established and planned routes within each jurisdiction and work to establish a regional priority for funding and grant opportunities.
- **Action**—Mid-term; perform a detail analysis for constructing each of the recommended greenways and blueways (paddle trails). The analysis should including design, engineering, and construction information that can be used for funding purposes.

Funding for recreation and tourism related projects can be limited. The Western Piedmont Council of Government has done an excellent job over the years matching grant funding, private monies and public dollars for plan development and project implementation. In fact, the study is a direct result of marrying five separate grant funding sources, local jurisdiction funds, non-point organizations, and private industry donations. Recognizing that, it sometimes takes creative approaches for funding and many different pots of money to make a project successful. This section identifies and describes many different funding and development techniques which could be utilized as implementation tools for the recommendations found within this document.

7.2.1 Land Conservation/Management Toolkit

7.2.1.1 State Grant and Technical Assistance Programs

- **Non-Point Source Management Program: Section 319 NPS Grant Program**—The Section 319 Grant program was established to provide funding for efforts to curb non-point source (NPS) pollution, including that which occurs through storm water runoff. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency provides funds to state and tribal agencies, which are then allocated via a competitive grant process to organizations to address current or potential NPS concerns. Funds may be used to demonstrate best management practices (BMPs), establish Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) for a watershed, or to restore impaired streams or other water resources.
- **North Carolina Clean Water Management Trust Fund**—The Clean Water Management Trust Fund makes grants to local governments, state agencies and conservation non-profits to help finance projects that specifically address water pollution problems.



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- **North Carolina Parks and Recreation Trust Fund**—The North Carolina General Assembly established the Parks and Recreation Trust Fund (PARTF) on July 16, 1994 to fund improvements in the state's park system, to fund grants for local governments and to increase the public's access to the state's beaches. The Parks and Recreation Authority, an eleven-member appointed board, was also created to allocate funds from PARTF to the state parks and to the grants program for local governments. PARTF is the primary source of funding to build and renovate facilities in the state parks as well as to buy land for new and existing parks. The PARTF program also provides dollar-for-dollar grants to local governments. Recipients use the grants to acquire land and/or to develop parks and recreational projects that serve the general public.
- **North Carolina Ecosystem Enhancement Program**—According to the three-party Memorandum of Agreement that established the initiative's procedures in July 2003, the mission of the Ecosystem Enhancement Program is to "restore, enhance, preserve and protect the functions associated with wetlands, streams and riparian areas, including but not limited to those necessary for the restoration, maintenance and protection of water quality and riparian habitats throughout North Carolina."

EEP provides:

- High-quality, cost-effective projects for watershed improvement and protection;
 - Compensation for unavoidable environmental impacts associated with transportation-infrastructure and economic development; and
 - Detailed watershed-planning and project-implementation efforts within North Carolina's threatened or degraded watersheds.
- **North Carolina Natural Heritage Trust Fund**—Established in 1987, the North Carolina Natural Heritage Trust fund provides supplemental funding to select state agencies for the acquisition and protection of important natural areas, to preserve the state's ecological diversity and cultural heritage, and to inventory the natural heritage resources of the state. The enabling legislation is found at General Statute Article 5A Sections 113-77.6 through 113-77.9. Access to these grant monies will require coordination/partnering with a state agency.
 - **North Carolina Registry of Natural Areas Program**—If a natural area is not available for purchase, its ecological significance can be recognized through a Registry agreement, which is a voluntary agreement with the landowner that provides limited protection but recognizes the owner's commitment to conservation of the area. In 2004 more than 300 natural areas were listed as Registered Natural Heritage Areas. NC NHP is actively involved in conservation planning with local governments, as part of One North Carolina Naturally. In addition to ecological information about natural areas, NC NHP provides information about sources of conservation dollars, potential conservation partnerships, and changes in policy or legislation that will influence conservation opportunities.
 - **Adopt-A-Trail Program**—The Adopt-A-Trail program (AAT) awards \$108,000 annually to government agencies, nonprofit organizations and private trail groups for trail projects. The maximum grant award is \$5,000 and it requires no local match or in-kind services. The funds can be used for trail building, trail signage and facilities, trail maintenance, trail brochures and maps and other related uses. The program is administered by the State Trails Program which is a division of Parks and Recreation.

7.2.1.2 Federal Grant and Technical Assistance Programs

- **USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service:**
 - **Conservation Reserve Program**—The Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) provides technical and financial assistance to eligible farmers, ranchers, and public entities to address soil, water, and related natural resource concerns on their lands in an environmentally beneficial and cost-effective manner. It encourages farmers to convert highly erodible cropland or other environmentally sensitive acreage to vegetative cover, such as tame or native grasses, wildlife



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plantings, trees, filter strips, or riparian buffers. Farmers receive an annual rental payment for the term of the multi-year contract. Cost sharing is provided to establish the vegetative cover practices.

- **Wetlands Reserve Program**—The Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) is a voluntary program that provides technical and financial assistance to eligible landowners to restore, enhance, and protect wetlands. Landowners have the option of enrolling eligible lands through permanent easements, 30-year easements, or restoration cost-share agreements. This NRCS program is offered on a continuous sign-up basis and is available Nationwide. This program offers landowners an opportunity to establish, at minimal cost, long-term conservation and wildlife habitat enhancement practices, and protection.
- **Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program**—This voluntary program is for private landowners that want to improve wildlife habitat on their property. This program includes technical assistance and cost share payments. Landowners prepare and implement a wildlife habitat development plan. Implementation assistance can be provided by the NRCS or other State, or nonprofit organization. The NRCS and landowner enter into a 5-10 year cost sharing agreement.
- **Grassland Reserve Program**—This voluntary program provides landowners the opportunity to conserve and protect grasslands on their property. This program emphasizes preservation and restoration of native and natural grasslands, and supports grazing operations and the maintenance and improvement of plant and animal diversity. Landowners can participate through easements or rental agreements. Easements would be either 30 years in duration or a permanent easement. Rental agreements would range from 10-30 year contracts.
- **Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program**—This NRCS program is intended to assist farmers and ranchers keep their land in agriculture. This program provides funds to local governments, States, or Tribal organizations with existing farmland protection programs to purchase conservation easements. This program also assists landowners with significant historic or archeological resources on their property. The funded organization or governmental entity then works with landowners, processes the easement acquisition, and holds, manages, and enforces the easement.
- **Environmental Quality Incentives Program**—This program offers 5 to 10 year contracts that provide incentive payments and cost sharing for needed conservation practices. Cost sharing may pay up to 75 percent of the costs of conservation practices such as grassed waterways, filter strips, manure management facilities, and other practices important to improving and maintaining the natural resources in the area. Land must be in a priority area as determined by the NRCS where there are significant problems with natural resources. High priority is given to areas where state or local governments can share in the cost of projects and where agricultural improvements will help meet water quality and other environmental objectives. These activities must be carried out according to a conservation plan.
- National Park Service:
 - **Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Programs**—This program is intended to preserve open space, conserve rivers, and develop trails and greenways. The National Park Service provides assistance that includes developing partnerships, resource assessment, and developing concept plans.
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service:
 - **Partners for Wildlife**—This program is intended to restore wetlands on private land in Illinois to provide habitat for transient waterfowl and other wildlife, improve surface water quality, provide flood protection, and recharge groundwater through a fund matching agreement with the IDNR Division of Wildlife Resources. Up to 100 percent cost-share is available for restoring wetlands including survey and design, construction of earthen dikes, tile excavation and installing water



control structures. Eligible participants are private landowners with restorable wetlands, which they agree to maintain for 10 years.

- **Private Stewardship Grants Program**—The Private Stewardship Program provides grants and other assistance on a competitive basis to individuals and groups engaged in local, private, and voluntary conservation efforts that benefit federally listed, proposed, or candidate species, or other at-risk species. Diverse panels of representatives from State and Federal Government, conservation organizations, agriculture and development interests, and the science community assess applications and make recommendations to the Secretary of the Interior, who awards the grants. The Private Stewardship Program was initiated during Fiscal Year 2002, with grants first awarded during Fiscal Year 2003.
- **Landowner Incentive Program**—This program provides matching, competitively awarded grants to States to establish or supplement existing landowner incentive programs that provide technical and financial assistance, including habitat protection and restoration, to private landowners for the protection and management of habitat to benefit federally listed, proposed, candidate, or other at-risk species on private lands.

7.2.1.3 Not for Profit Grant and Technical Assistance

- **Conservation Trust for North Carolina**—The Conservation Trust for North Carolina is a non-profit statewide conservation organization. Our mission is to protect our state's land and water through statewide conservation and cooperative work with land trusts to preserve our natural resources as a legacy for future generations. The Conservation Trust works directly with landowners, local land trusts, and government agencies to protect land and water resources most important to local communities throughout the state. The Conservation Trust is an umbrella organization that provides a wide array of technical and financial services to the state's network of 23 local and regional land trusts. Services include: Grants and Loans; Legislative Advocacy; Coordinated Public Relations; Management of Contracts with State Government Conservation Programs and Information Exchange, Training, and Strategic Planning.

Contact: 1028 Washington Street
Raleigh, North Carolina 27606
Phone: 919.828.4199
Fax: 919.828.4508

- **Catawba Lands Conservancy**—Catawba Lands Conservancy protects the land, water and wildlife resources of the Southern Piedmont and Lower Catawba River Basin to sustain our region's health, natural beauty and ecological diversity now and in the future. The Catawba Lands Conservancy region includes the Lower Catawba River Basin and Southern Piedmont of NC, all or portions of Catawba, Gaston, Lincoln, Mecklenburg, Iredell, and Union Counties.

Contact: 105 West Morehead Street
Suite B
Charlotte, North Carolina 28202
Email: info@catawbalands.org
Website: www.catawbalands.org
Phone: 704.342.3330
Fax: 704.342.3340

- **Foothill's Conservancy of North Carolina**—Works cooperatively with landowners and public and private conservation partners to preserve and protect important natural areas and open spaces of the Blue Ridge Foothills region, including watersheds, environmentally significant habitats, forests, and farmland, for this and future generations. Foothills region includes Alexander, Burke, Caldwell, Catawba, Cleveland, Lincoln, McDowell, and Rutherford Counties.



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Contact: P.O. Box 3023
Morganton, North Carolina 28680
Email: info@foothillsconservancy.org
Website: www.foothillsconservancy.org
Phone: 828.437.9930
Fax: 828.437.9912

- **Trust for Public Land**¹⁵—The Trust for Public Land (TPL) helps structure, negotiate, and complete land transactions that create parks and protected natural areas. TPL will serve as an independent agent, buying land from willing sellers then transferring it with a clean title to public agencies, land trusts, or other groups. On occasion, TPL will get involved in conservation easements. TPL can assist local communities develop a conservation vision, establish priorities, and identify appropriate lands for conservation. The TPL can also assist communities with designing and promoting public funding programs and public education programs.

Contact: The Trust for Public Land

- **The Nature Conservancy**¹⁶—The Nature Conservancy is a global conservation organization that works at the local scale. The Nature Conservancy works with local communities to develop land acquisition programs, conservation easements, conservation “buyer” programs, and conservation finance programs. The Nature Conservancy also works to engage the local business community to join land conservation partnerships.

Contact: The Nature Conservancy

- **Conservation Fund**—The Conservation Fund is dedicated to protecting America’s most important landscapes and waterways. Through its partnership-driven approach, the Fund works across all 50 states to preserve each region’s unique natural resources, cultural heritage, and historic places. Committed to effectiveness, efficiency, and environmental and economic balance, the Fund is pioneering a new environmentalism that is results-oriented and sustainable, agile and inclusive, and one that inspires future generations.

Contact: North Carolina Office
P.O. Box 271
Chapel Hill, North Carolina 27514
Phone: 919.967.2223
Fax: 919.967.9702

- **Habitat Enhancement Fund**—Areas along the shorelines of reservoirs known as riparian zones are critical habitats for plants, animals and fish. In order to protect and enhance these vital areas Duke Power, the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission, and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service created a fund to improve fish and wildlife habitats at the reservoirs operated by Duke Power on the Catawba River. This program provides funding for activities that enhance fisheries and wildlife habitats such as constructing fish-friendly piers, installing prefabricated fish habitats, sinking brush-piles and planting shoreline vegetation or other habitat-enhancement efforts.

Habitat Enhancement Fund payments from permit application fees are placed into the fund administered by the Charlotte-based Foundation for the Carolinas. Funding can be used for enhancement activities within the Catawba-Wateree Project Boundary and can also be used for enhancing land and water areas contiguous with the project boundary when land owner approval requirements are met.

To apply for funding for an enhancement project, contact Duke Power Lake Management, (800) 443-5193.

¹⁵The Trust For Public Land website.

¹⁶The Nature Conservancy website.



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▪ **Conservation/Management Tools:**

- **Agricultural Easement**—Conservation easements, such as the NRCS Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program that preserves working landscapes such as farms or ranches. This purchased easement allows the continuation of working farm or ranch activities.
- **Conservation Bank**—Similar to wetland mitigation banks, conservation banks are permanently protected privately or publicly owned lands that are managed for endangered, threatened, and other at-risk species. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) approves habitat or species credits based on the natural resource values on the bank lands. In exchange for permanently protecting the bank lands and managing them for listed and other at-risk species, conservation bank owners may sell credits to developers or others who need to compensate for the environmental impacts of their projects.
- **Conservation Easement**—Conservation easements are voluntary, legal agreements between a landowner (including companies/businesses) and a land trust that permanently limits a property's uses in order to preserve its conservation values. Conservation easements are permanent agreements, recorded by the County as an easement on the land, and applied to any subsequent land ownership. This type of easement preserves land for wildlife, recreation, cultural, historical, scenic, or other natural values. Easements can be donated or purchased.
 - **Donated Easement**—An example of a donated easement is The Land Conservancy's easement program. The easement donation to The Land Conservancy generally requires a maintenance endowment to provide ongoing monitoring and meet legal requirements of the easement. Counties could provide some funding assistance for the maintenance endowment.
 - **Purchased Easement**—Examples of a purchased easement are the NRCS Wetland Reserve Program (WRP) and The Nature Conservancy's Conservation Buyer Program. The WRP may include the purchase of an easement from the existing property owner by the NRCS, generally based on the land's potential development value minus its undeveloped/conservation value. The Conservation Buyer Program matches conservation-minded buyers with landowners selling desirable open lands. Those individuals, organizations, or governmental entities interested in purchasing land and preserving it with a voluntary conservation easement are eligible for substantial federal tax deductions along with other tax benefits. Counties could provide funding assistance for the purchase of conservation easements through partner organizations or explore the option of establishing a County program.
- **Conservation Technical Assistance Programs**—Provide qualified landowners with the tools necessary to evaluate their conservation options and implement a conservation plan. This includes education programs for landowners and the general public about the importance of habitat protection and the tools available for stewardship activities on private lands. This could be accomplished through partnerships with land conservation organizations and state and Federal agencies listed in the Conservation/Management Partners section.
- **Fee Title Acquisition**—Fee title (also called "fee simple") is a real estate term that means the type of ownership giving the owner the maximum interest in the land, entitling the owner to use the property in any manner consistent with federal, state and local laws and ordinances. The simplest tools for acquiring land in fee title are through donation, bargain sale, or outright purchase. The variety of donation methods includes the following:
 - **Donation**—Landowners may simply donate land to a land conservation organization or governmental entity. Donation of land typically provides the landowner an income tax deduction equal to the land's current fair market value.



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- **Bequest**—Bequest provisions in a will and/or a revocable or irrevocable living trust allow the donor to control the distribution of his or her estate and to preserve as much of the estate as possible through judicious use of tax-saving opportunities.
- **Gifts of Land with Reserved Life Estates**—Landowners may donate land, but reserve for themselves and sometimes others the right to use and enjoy the property during their lifetimes.
- **Charitable Gift Annuity**—Partly a charitable gift and partly a purchase of an annuity contract. The donor transfers property to a steward. In return, the steward enters into a contract agreeing to pay the donor and, if desired, one other beneficiary a fixed annuity for life.
- **Land Trust**—A private not-for-profit corporation formed to protect and manage land for particular uses or features by buying or leasing land, or assuming conservation easements on land. Partnerships should be established with these organizations to acquire land conservation easements, or title to lands for conservation purposes.
- **Property Tax Incentives**—Landowners may be eligible for reductions in property tax assessment when participating in conservation easement programs. Landowners could receive reductions in property taxes for participating in programs that enhance and protect wildlife habitat, archeological or historic resources, leasing land to a park district, or developing forestry management plans.
- **Wetland Mitigation Bank**—A wetland mitigation bank is the system of accounting for wetland loss and compensation for unavoidable loss of wetlands. The purpose of this program is to restore and protect environmentally sensitive wetland areas, while balancing the need for responsible economic growth. Wetland banking involves acquisition of property rights for parcels of land and provides the holder of those property rights the ability to restore or create wetland areas to compensate for the unavoidable loss of wetlands. Specifically, as authorized and regulated by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the objective of a wetland mitigation bank is to provide wetland mitigation options to public and private entities within a service area to compensate for wetland impacts by Clean Water Act Section 404/401 permit actions.

7.2.1.4 Information Resources and Funding Sources for Trails and Greenways

7.2.1.4.1 Introduction

Implementing greenways and trails will require the use of multiple finding sources both private and public. The following listing of information resources and funding sources (*courtesy of the 1999-Mecklenburg County Greenway Master Plan*) is not intended to be used as a starting point for searching alternatives. The most successful projects tend to use multiple resources to receive funding that can further leverage local money or investment to develop more facilities or land.

7.2.1.4.2 Public Funding Sources—Federal Funding

Several federal programs offer financial aid for projects that aim to improve community infrastructure, transportation, housing, and recreation programs. Some of the federal programs that can be used to fund greenways include:

- **Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA21)**—A primary source of federal funding for greenways is through the Transportation Equity Act of 1998 (TEA21), formerly the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA). ISTEA provided millions of dollars in funding for bicycle and pedestrian transportation projects across the country and will provide millions more as TEA21. There are many sections of TEA21 that support the development of bicycle and pedestrian transportation corridors. NCDOT can utilize funding from any of these subsets of TEA21. Those sections that apply to the creation of greenways, sidewalks and bikeways include:



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- **Surface Transportation Program (STP) Funds**—These funds can be used for bicycle and pedestrian facility construction or non-construction projects such as brochures, public service announcements, and route maps. The projects must be related to bicycle and pedestrian transportation and must be part of the Long Range Transportation Plan. These funds are programmed by the MPO in the Transportation Improvement Program.
- **Transportation Enhancements Program**—More than \$4-billion is available through TEA21 for Transportation Enhancements. Ten percent of North Carolina's annual STP funds (over \$100 million for the next six years) are available for enhancements, which include projects such as trails, greenways, sidewalks, signage, bikeways, safety education, and wildlife under-crossings. There is usually a 20 percent match of local funds required (some states will accept donations of services, materials or land in lieu of cash) and there are several key requirements that projects must meet in order to receive these funds. The North Carolina DOT administers TEA21 funding and should be contacted for further details.
- **Transit Enhancement Activities**—This will generate approximately \$30 million annually for these activities, which will then be divided among the 125 largest urban areas in the U. S. Activities eligible for funding include pedestrian access and walkways, bicycle access, bike storage facilities, bike-on-bus racks, and transit connections to parks within the transit service area.
- **Recreational Trails Program**—A component of TEA21, the Recreational Trails Program is a funding source to assist with the development of non-motorized and motorized trails. The Program uses funds paid into the Highway Trust Fund from fees on non-highway recreation fuel used by off-road vehicles and camping equipment. This money can be spent on the acquisition of easements and fee simple title to property, trail development, construction and maintenance. Project amounts vary by state, with most ranging from \$2,000 to \$50,000. Through state agencies, approximately \$50-million per year is available to private and public sector organizations. Projects need a 20 percent match. Federal agency project sponsors or other federal programs may provide additional federal share up to 95 percent. Local matches can be in the form of donations of services, materials, or land. Projects funded must be consistent with the Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan. Contact NCDOT for more information.
- **Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Improvement Program (CMAQ)**—The CMAQ program was **created** to reduce congestion on local streets and improve air quality. Funds are available to communities designated as "non-attainment" areas for air quality, meaning the air is more polluted than federal standards allow. Funds are also available to "maintenance" areas, former non-attainment areas that are now in compliance. Funds are distributed to states based on population by county and the severity of air quality problems. A 20 percent local match is required.
- **Community Development Block Grant Program**—The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) offers financial grants to communities for neighborhood revitalization, economic development, and improvements to community facilities and services, especially in low and moderate-income areas. Several communities have used HUD funds to develop greenways.
- **Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) Grants**—Established in 1965 to provide park and recreation opportunities to residents throughout the United States. Money for the fund comes from the sale or lease of nonrenewable resources, primarily federal offshore oil and gas leases and surplus federal land sales. LWCF funds are used by federal agencies to acquire additions to National Parks, Forests, and Wildlife Refuges. In the past, Congress has also appropriated LWCF moneys for so-called "state-side" projects. These "state-side" LWCF grants can be used by communities to acquire and build a variety of park and recreation facilities, including trails and greenways. "State-side" LWCF funds are annually distributed by the National Park Service through the North Carolina Department of Environmental Health and Natural Resources (DEHNR). Communities must match LWCF grants with 50 percent of the local project costs through in-kind services or cash. All projects funded by LWCF grants must be used exclusively for recreation purposes, in perpetuity. Funding for this program has not been available for several years, although funds could be allocated in the future.



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- **Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention (Small Watersheds) Grants**—The USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) provides funding to state and local agencies or nonprofit organizations authorized to carry out, maintain, and operate watershed improvements involving less than 250,000 acres. The NRCS provides financial and technical assistance to eligible projects to improve watershed protection, flood prevention, sedimentation control, public water-based fish and wildlife enhancements, and recreation planning. The NRCS requires a 50 percent local match for public recreation, and fish and wildlife projects.
- **Conservation Reserve Program**—The USDA, through its Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service, provides payments to farm owners and operators to place highly erodible or environmentally sensitive landscapes into a 10-15 year conservation contract. The participant, in return for annual payments during this period, agrees to implement a conservation plan approved by the local conservation district for converting these sensitive lands to a less intensive use. Individuals, associations, corporations, estates, trusts, cities, counties, and other entities are eligible for this program. This program can be used to fund the maintenance of open space and non-public use greenways along water bodies and ridge lines. Contact NRCS.
- **Wetlands Reserve Program**—The USDA also provides direct payments to private landowners who agree to place sensitive wetlands under permanent easements. This program can be used to fund the protection of open space and greenways within riparian corridors. It is administered by the NRCS in North Carolina.
- **Hazard Mitigation Grant Program**—The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) provides grants to state and local governments for implementing long-term hazard mitigation measures following a major disaster declaration. Eligible projects include the acquisition and relocation of repetitive flood structures. Such lands, once acquired, can be converted into greenways for flood mitigation purposes. A 25 percent local match is required. All applications must be submitted no later than 90 days following FEMA's approval of the State Hazard Mitigation plan.
- **Flood Mitigation Assistance**—This FEMA program provides funds to states and communities to help reduce the long-term risk of flood damage to structures. Eligible projects include acquisition and relocation of insured structures. Grantees must participate in the National Flood Insurance Program and a 25 percent local match is required.
- **Conservation Contracts**—The USDA Farm Service Agency can forgive debt from Farm Loan Program loans in exchange for conservation contracts on environmentally sensitive portions of a borrower's property. Contracts can be set up for conservation, recreational and wildlife purposes on farm property, including properties adjacent to streams and rivers. Interested individual borrowers should contact their local Farm Service Agency office to apply.

7.2.1.4.3 Public Funding Sources – State Funding

- **North Carolina Parks and Recreation Trust Fund (PARTF)**—this source provides more matching funds annually for local recreation land acquisition, development, and renovation to communities across the state. The funding source, which comes from a real estate transfer tax, requires a 50-50 match from local government and no more than \$500,000 can be requested. Contact NC-Recreational Resources Service for additional information (919-515-7118).
- **Clean Water Management Trust Fund**—This Fund is another new funding source which provides dollars to build riparian buffers for environmental, recreational, and educational benefits. This can be a major funding source for greenways over \$40 million available every year.
- **Water Resources Development Project**—This funding source provides up to \$1 million per year for acquisition and development of water-based recreation sites, including greenways. A 50-50 match is required. NCDENR-Division of Water Resources should be contacted for additional information.
- **North Carolina Department of Transportation**—See TEA21 text above.



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7.2.1.4.4 Public Funding Sources – Local Funding

- **Local Taxes**—Sales tax, special taxes need state legislature approval.
- **Impact Fees**—Administered thru development or subdivision ordinances.
- Bond Referendums
- Local Capital Improvements Program

7.2.1.4.5 Public Funding Sources – Private Funding Sources

Private foundations, corporations, and other conservation-minded benefactors can provide assistance for park and trail development. Generally, local foundations and businesses will have a greater interest in funding local projects. Some local sources are listed below:

North Carolina Community Foundation
4601 Six Forks Road
Suite 524
Raleigh, North Carolina 27609
(A source for locating community foundations.)
www.nccommunityfoundation.org

Local Foundations:

Catawba Valley Community Foundation
(NCCF Affiliate)
P.O. Box 2851
Hickory, North Carolina 28603
[www.nccommunityfoundation.org/affiliates/
central_western/catawba_valley](http://www.nccommunityfoundation.org/affiliates/central_western/catawba_valley)

Associated Foundations:

- The Bolick Foundation
- Beaver Family Foundation

Endowment Funds:

- Catawba Valley Unrestricted Endowment
- Frances Moody Endowment
- Granite Savings Bank Unrestricted Endowment

Funds/Foundations Active in the Area:

The Community Foundation of Western
North Carolina
P.O. Box 1888
Asheville, North Carolina 28802.1888
14 College Street
Asheville, North Carolina 28802
www.cfwncc.org

Foundation For The Carolinas
217 South Tryon Street
Charlotte, North Carolina 28202.3201
www.ffc.org

- Kenneth K. Millholland and Suzanne G. Millholland Endowment

Community Foundation of Burke County,
Inc.
P.O. Box 1156
Morganton, North Carolina 28680.1156
Email: cbbc123@bellsouth.net

Lenoir Community Foundation, Inc.
P.O. Box 1260
Lenoir, North Carolina 28645.1260

The Reese Foundation
P.O. Box 69
Hickory, North Carolina 28603
Phone: 704.322.3431

The Duke Endowment
100 North Tryon Street
Suite 3500
Charlotte, North Carolina 28202.4012
www.dukeendowment.org

Mary Reynolds Babcock Foundation
2920 Reynolda Road
Winston-Salem, North Carolina 27106
www.mrbf.org



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Bank of America Foundation
www.bankofamerica.com/foundation

Carolina Power & Light Foundation (CP&L)
P.O. Box 2591
Raleigh, North Carolina 27602.2591
Phone: 919.546.6309

Duke Energy Foundation
P.O. Box 1244 (PBO3Q)
Charlotte, NC 28201-1244
Phone: 704.382.7200

Wachovia Foundation
The Wachovia Foundation
c/o Wachovia Bank of North Carolina, N. A.
P.O. Box 3099

- Funds/Foundations from Around the State:

Venture Grants
1043 East Morehead Street
Suite 100
Charlotte, North Carolina 28234.4769
Phone: 704.376.9541

Ralph N. Jones Foundation
2316 South Boulevard
Charlotte, North Carolina 28203
Phone: 704.333.8930

The Sing Foundation
1701 South Boulevard
Charlotte, North Carolina 28203

Philip L. Van Every Foundation
c/o Lance Inc.
P.O. Box 32368
Charlotte, North Carolina 28232
Phone: 704.554.1421

O'H. Rankin Foundation
2611 Richardson Drive
Charlotte, North Carolina 28211
Phone: 704.364.0070

Lance Foundation
P.O. Box 32368
Charlotte, North Carolina 28232
Phone: 704.554.1421

Dowd Foundation
P.O. Box 35430
Charlotte, North Carolina 28235
Phone: 704.372.5030

Winston-Salem, North Carolina 27150.7131
100 North Main Street
Winston-Salem, North Carolina 27150

A.J. Fletcher Foundation
P.O. Box 12800
Raleigh, North Carolina 27605
220 Fayetteville Street Mall
Raleigh, North Carolina 27601
www.ajf.org

Golden Leaf Foundation
107 SE Main Street
Suite 500
Rocky Mount, North Carolina 27801
www.goldenleaf.org

The Dickson Foundation
2000 Two First Union Center
Charlotte, North Carolina 28282
Phone: 704.372.5404

Harry L. Dalton Foundation
736 Wachovia Center
Charlotte, North Carolina 28285
Phone: 704.332.5380

The Culbertson Foundation
638 Museum Drive
Charlotte, North Carolina 28207
Phone: 704.375.4060

The Blumenthal Foundation
P.O. Box 34689
Charlotte, North Carolina 28234
Phone: 704.3776555

The Belk Foundation
2801 West Tyvola Road
Charlotte, North Carolina 28217.4500
Phone: 704.357.1000

Collins & Aikman Foundation
701 McCullough Drive
Charlotte, North Carolina 28262
Phone: 704.548.2389

D. F. Halton Foundation
P.O. Box 241167
Charlotte, North Carolina 28224
Phone: 704.523.6761



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James and Angelia Harris Foundation
P.O. Box 220427
Charlotte, North Carolina 28222
Phone: 704.364.6046

Hillsdale Fund
P.O. Box 20124
Greensboro, North Carolina 27420
Phone: 336.274.5471

The Kathleen Price Bryan Family Fund
220 South Eugene Street
Greensboro, North Carolina 27401
Phone: 336.273.0080

Grace Richardson Fund and
Grace Jones Richardson Trust
c/o Piedmont Financial Co., Inc.
P.O. Box 20124
Greensboro, North Carolina 27420.0124
Phone: 336.484.2033

The Bailey Wildlife Foundation
10223 Bushveld Lane
Raleigh, North Carolina 27612.6149

A. E. Finley Foundation
P.O. Box 98266
Raleigh, North Carolina 27624

Provident Benevolent Foundation
c/o Wachovia Charitable Funds
100 North Main Street
Winston-Salem, North Carolina 27150.7131
Phone: 336.732.6478

Mary Reynolds Babcock Foundation
102 Reynolds Village
Winston-Salem, North Carolina 27106.5123

John and Anna Hanes Foundation
c/o Wachovia Bank of North Carolina, N.A.
P.O. Box 3099
MC-37131
Winston-Salem, North Carolina 27150
Phone: 336.732.5274

Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation, Inc.
147 South Cherry Street
Suite 200
Winston-Salem, North Carolina 27101.5287
www.zsr.org

The Warner Foundation
P.O. Box 16279
Chapel Hill, North Carolina 27516
www.thewarnerfoundation.org

Fund for Southern Communities
315 West Ponce De Leon Avenue, #1061
Decatur, Georgia 30030
www.fundforsouth.org

The Steele-Reese Foundation
c/o Appalachian Program Director
3121 Grantham Way
Lexington, Kentucky 40509
www.steele-reese.org/

▪ General Funding and Project Development Information:

Created by the American Recreation Coalition and Reserve America and sponsored by seven federal agencies, the “Toolbox for the Great Outdoors” lists many different funding and development programs which relate directly to recreation and infrastructure development. The website is www.tools4outdoors.us organizes the toolbox in a searchable database by topics and projects. In reviewing this resource, the team discovered 42 potential sources/programs in the seven different categories that could provide assistance to the region.

▪ Categories:

- Transportation
- Wildlife, Fisheries, and Conservation
- Volunteers and Partnerships
- Youth Programs, Contests, Competitions, and Internships
- Health and Education
- Economic Development and Effective Program Management
- Technical Assistance and Design Programs



- A Sampling of these Funding Sources include:
 - Recreational Trail Program
 - Take Pride in America
 - AmeriCorps and Youth Conservation Service Corps
 - Federal Land Recreation Enhancement Act
 - Tourism-related Foundation Grant
 - River, Trails, and Conservation Assistance

7.3 Partnership Development

At all levels of government, revenue streams are chronically low as the needs of a community typically grow. This is particularly noticeable when speaking of region-wide efforts. A method for building a community's capacity to meet growing demand for outdoor experiences and enhanced natural resources is to development partnerships. Partnerships could be created with private and not-for-profit organizations and other governmental agencies with shared values and interests. Partnerships are typically intended to be long-term relationships that address issues that provide mutual benefits for both partners and provide strong public support for projects or funding for a particular project. Partners for building region-wide outdoor recreation opportunities or enhancing water quality and natural resources can range from organizations responsible for fundraising to groups that put sweat equity into trail-building.

Partnerships should enhance the ability of the four county area to meet the demand for recreation, balanced with natural resource protection, and should be established as long-term relationships. These relationships should ensure that both parties receive a sense of ownership in the process and outcome of the projects attacked through the partnership. Potential partners include the National Park Service, U.S. Forest Service, North Carolina Department of Natural Resources, not-for-profit organizations such as The Nature Conservancy, Audubon Society. Other opportunities include partnering with organizations such as a "Friends of..." An example might be development of a Friends of Wilson Creek which could take the lead in fundraising and organizing volunteer efforts. Partnerships could include sharing equipment, expertise or other actions that leverage resources.

7.4 Marketing Outreach

7.4.1 Creating a Marketing Plan

The Greater Hickory Region offers the best climate and recreation, but others need to know that so they come and experience it as well. A marketing plan helps an organization or business to target where they are going in terms of where revenue is going to come from and a strategy on how to get it. Remember that your marketing plan is a work in progress—as the vision for the organization changes, so does the plan. Just as it was a group effort in developing the task force for this study it will be critical that a marketing plan be a group effort. Representatives from throughout the region with expertise in appropriate areas should take part in developing some part of the plan. Outside advisors with expertise in areas such as, finance, consulting/professional services, legal, business development, training, customer support, IT, and operations should also be used strategically to review and direct a plan.

The basics steps for building a marketing plan are presented below to simplify the process and get the committee underway in producing a plan.

First, start with some analysis... Unlike most businesses the "product" has not been 100 percent developed, therefore "product development" will be part of this first step. Defining the products to promote will likely be a work in progress as more information is collected. The analysis includes identifying how the product stands up to the competition. This will require identifying the competition and seeing what the region has going for it that others don't. When lacking competitive advantages, get some help in brainstorming the future vision of the organization what is needed to outshine the competition. This is the time to determine how the region wants to be known—for example the high-



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quality/luxury supplier, a niche specialist, or a low-cost supplier (for example the Adirondacks versus Gatlinburg). The product likely will be adapted to the analysis as the plan materializes.

Second, examine or reexamine the service packages/product lines being offered to make them speak consistently with the vision that has been laid out. If the region wants to be the high-quality supplier, then officials must make sure the price and quality is higher than the competition.

Third, figure out what target markets are best suited to competitive positioning. Whether they are consumer targets, or business targets, they must be identified as to who they are and whether they really care about what is being offered. A target can then be set for how many clients the region can possibly attract and possibly realize (consumer targets = age, financial standing, life style etc, Business targets= industries/trades such as tourism, festivals, conventions, etc.).

Finally, once the targets are known, figure out how to reach them...through advertising, sales representation, public relations, the web, or other distribution networks. Make a budget for all of the contact methods to be used, based on how much more business can be handled and estimate a conservative closing ratio attained from the marketing activities to derive a revenue forecast that can actually mean something.

7.4.2 Getting Started: It's the Only Way to Ever Get It Done

Developing a marketing plan is hard work—a long, painful process, but a very necessary one. The plan will be the region's roadmap for marketing the organization investors/stakeholders, promoting the product or service, and ensuring the internal and external teams are all on the same page.

At times, the task seems a bit overwhelming. The best way to start is to do just that—start. Use the information below as a template and simply start answering the questions. Get some professional help—consider using a professional consultant to provide outside perspective and keep the project on track. Most people wouldn't do their own dental work. The same is true for a marketing plan.

7.4.2.1 Organization Description

Describe the organization using as few words as possible. Identify who the region is, what the region does, and why customers should visit. Think about how the organization should grow and what is wanted for the future. Ask and answer the following questions:

- What is the most important statement we can make about the organization?
- Why use this organization?
- How much do we want to grow?
- What are our goals for the organization?

7.4.2.2 Products and/or Services

Describe clearly and succinctly what the product is and/or what services are provided. What are the benefits to the customer/user and why? If it cannot be stated simply and clearly, how can we expect the world to understand?

- The product/service/area is...
- The product/service/area enables...
- The product/service/area provides...

7.4.2.3 Marketing Objectives

What are the desired outcomes?

- Attract investors and stakeholders?
- Introduce new focus and strategy?



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- Introduce new product?
- Increase awareness?
- Generate leads?

7.4.2.4 Target Market

It's critical that to identify the region's market. And that means research, research, research.

- Who are they?(consumer, industry, business)
- What is their pain? (how do they need our service)
- What are the important market trends?
- What are the industry analysts and media saying?

7.4.2.5 Positioning/Messaging

If we can't explain who the region is and what the region has to offer so that the layman can understand it, it's too complicated to bring to the marketplace. Focus on business solution, rather than just cool technology. Keep in mind that it's rare to create a new category of business or a solution. The tendency will be to pigeonhole or arbitrarily place the region into a category.

- How do/will industry analysts categorize our organization company?
- How are competitors categorized?
- Develop an elevator pitch.
- Make sure everyone in the organization agrees with and understands the position

7.4.2.6 Competition

Of course the region has competition—real and perceived—even if the area is unique. Even the first automobile competed with the horse and buggy.

- Who is your competition?
- What are their strengths and weaknesses?
- How does the region differentiate itself?
- What are the region's competitive advantages?

7.4.2.7 Partners/Business Relationships

One of the best ways to be successful is to find complementary partners and build mutually beneficial relationships. Results could include beta plan, agreements, and joint marketing plan. Partners can include:

- Beta candidates
- Indirect channels
- Technology partners
- Marketing partners
- Industry analyst sponsor/champion

7.4.2.8 Marketing Programs

How does the region get the word out and how much is it going to cost? How do you combine traditional and new media? The Marketing Communication Plan will result from this section. Areas of marketing activity include:

- Budget (10 to 15 percent of projected revenue, and sometimes significantly more)
- Target industry and business publications, target industry analysts
- Public relations
- Direct mail/advertising
- Trade shows



- Collateral
- Website
- Internal/external launch
- Process/tools to track results

7.4.2.9 Sales and Distribution

What are short and long-term sales/revenue goals? How will the product be sold and distributed?

- Sales goals
- New/existing customers
- Direct channels
- Indirect channels
- Telemarketing
- Sales training, targeted customers, compensation plan

7.4.2.10 Risks and Assumptions

Determine what the challenges and issues are, and be realistic about what can go wrong. Gather information from different points of view, and develop a plan to address issues.

- Develop a SWOT Analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats).
- Involve all areas of the company as well as outside advisors.
- Ask yourself: What if?
- Think about the worst-case scenario.
- Consider Plan B and beyond.

7.4.2.11 Schedule/Milestones

Decide who will do what when and write it down. Determine if there are any key events, such as a trade show, that drive marketing. Remember planning is only half the battle. You also have to implement well.

- Priorities
- Resources and responsibilities
- Time lines
- Key events

7.5 Destination Project and/or Strategy Framework

Implementation of the proposed Mega Strategy Destination Project must be accomplished through a multi-faceted approach, due not only to the number of field requirements and programming, but the number of jurisdictions involved throughout the region to be involved in the project. Below is a listing of necessary steps and actions which must occur to properly implement this wide ranging project.

- **Network Resources**—Establish a network between all jurisdictions and associated departments within to coordinate field use, availability, condition, maintenance, and program. In addition, understanding the potential demand on the existing or proposed programming, and understanding of the regional influences of other similar facilities is a key component to identify early.
- **Establish Strengths or Focus**—Each participating jurisdiction should understand their particular strength or focus and how they can contribute to the regional plan; for example Morganton's emphasis might be youth baseball with their Catawba Meadows Complex, while Hickory might focus more toward youth soccer; while another might be keyed towards adult softball; it should also be understood that these focuses do not mean that each community only runs that event, it only means that it may be the hub.

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- **Agreements**—Enter into agreements between jurisdictions to be able to use fields during tournament events as a mutual benefit economic tool to attract visitors; this should include not only local governments but school systems, community colleges and universities and state owned lands and the private sector.
- **Evaluate Field Type and Maintenance**—Detailed analysis of existing fields and their quality to determine the type of use (tournament, local play, or practice) appropriate for each facility.
- **Field Development Plan**—Each participating jurisdiction should develop a plan of action to acquire land and develop additional fields for play based on the adopted programming. Develop a reliable probable construction cost estimate for each project. These estimates should not only include the development costs, but any land acquisition, offsite utilities, architect/engineering fees, development impact fees, owner's costs, etc. It is imperative that a contingency and an inflation ratio are also included in the estimates.
- **Funding Sources**—When pursuing grants and foundation requests, emphasize the fact that this is a regional effort using numbers which reflect benefits to a large population base.
- **Marketing and Promotion**—The development of new fields can be used as an effective marketing tool, but also a marketing plan should be established to recruit new tournaments and expand existing ones; potential use of sports program promoters should be consider to expand the programming, use, and opportunities for attract teams to the region. It is a competitive business for tournament facilities. The region must work together to promote the facilities and area. Establish a collaborative marketing plan with the local CVB or form a Sports Commission for the region. The use of magazine advertisements, promotions, website development, brochures, mailers and flyers (with quality photos) is vital to a successful marketing campaign. Use corporate sponsorships for naming rights and tournament sponsorship. Sporting events as a marketing tool are extremely popular because they appeal to the masses across all demographic segments.

7.5.1 The Paddle-Pedal-Pedestrian Trail Network

This project will be an ongoing process of regional implementation through local jurisdictions. A plan for an overall network should be completed including all trail opportunities. This information should be mapped as a layer, or several layers, in the regional GIS and merged with the Inventory Map. It is imperative that all trails be planned, accurately mapped and details about each written in similar fashion to the regional transportation plan. This is the only way the true connected network will be able to be seen as such. These should be divided into specific sections for users to determine the type of trail, anticipated activity, and trip planning. **Each jurisdiction too should develop comprehensive plans, which include bikeways, sidewalks and greenways, and all other types of pedestrian and bicycle facility.**

- **Regional**—The major Paddle Trails and Greenways listed in this plan serve as the backbone of the system and offers region-wide connection. The recognized national and regional designated trails (i.e., Overmountain Victory and Mountains-to-Sea) for hiking and bicycles should then be shown as major connections as well. This should include connections to regional systems that are adjacent or partially within the Greater Hickory Region such as the Voices and Choice 2020 Open Space Framework based on the Charlotte Region.
- **Bicycle**—The next level of the map/plan should incorporate all bicycle routes (shared and separated) that have been designated or commonly use, such as those shown in county and local government bicycle plans and routes documented by Hickory Velo Club. These include popular routes for bicycling like the Blue Ridge Parkway, the Bridge-to-Bridge route, bikeways, and multi-use trails where bicycles are permitted and local designated routes along highways and streets.
- **Pedestrian**—This tends to be the largest (mileage) segment of trail system in the region and includes the urban pedestrian plans and networks. This layer should incorporate all local greenway trails not specifically listed as major trails, a good example of which is the Hickory Greenway which connects Jaycee Park and Glen Hilton Park in the northwest section of the city (although a very

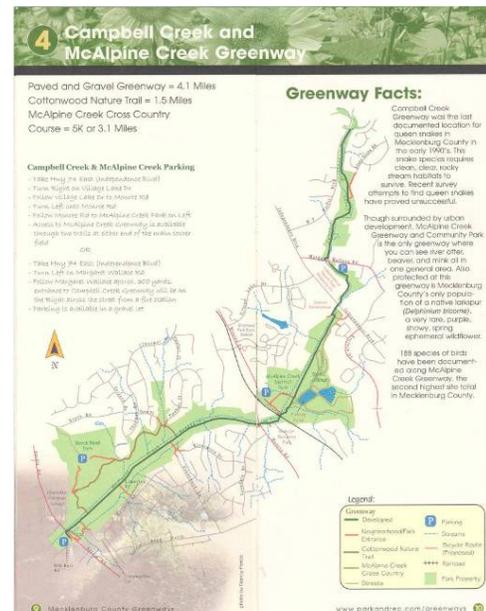


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important resource, at this time is not tied into a regional system, although it could easily be done through urban connections). Another key feature of this layer is the sidewalk system and future development plans as these serve to link the urban localized environment to the regional network.

Public Education and Marketing of the PPP should take place by a presentations and the development of information booklet. The Mecklenburg County Parks and Recreation Department have done an excellent job of developing such a brochure which offers information on greenway facts and safety along with system wide and specific maps. However one must remember that the best brochure or booklet or information is a wasted effort unless it is distributed to the users and potential users of the system.

The development of the comprehensive PPP Trail Network will take time, especially when public funding is limited for land acquisition and construction of greenways. Sidewalks connections also are difficult to program into local government budgets for existing streets and roads. In many cases, ordinances are in place in local jurisdictions to require sidewalks and greenway improvements as development occurs. Jurisdictions without these types of ordinances that require both types of pedestrian improvements should adopt such provisions as an initial implementation step. With this tool in place, portions of the system will be built by private funds as development occurs. National figures show that on an average, every \$50 spent on roads by state transportation departments, \$0.87 is spent on pedestrian facilities. Therefore it is important for local governments to understand that a certain amount of budget funds, a percentage of the streets and roads, should be assigned on pedestrian facilities. However that amount should be large enough to allow integral sections or links to be built in each fiscal year.



Courtesy of Mecklenburg County

General Policies to follow in the development of the PPP Trail Network:

- Encourage citizen involvement in the development of the PPP Trail Network.
- Promote awareness and safe use of the PPP Trail network through comprehensive education and enforcement programs.
- Preserve and reclaim natural floodplains to enhance water quality, protect wildlife habitats and open space, provide recreation and exercise opportunities and alternate transportation facilities.
- Develop a cost-effective and convenient greenway system that connects public and private open spaces throughout the region.
- Encourage private support and development of greenways that use planned and existing utility easements and road rights-of-ways to minimize public costs.
- When any jurisdiction disposes of surplus property, a public access easement should be retained across the property in conformance with the PPP Trail Network plans.
- Construct multi-use trails that are accessible to the physically challenged and meet ADA standards as topography permits.
- Consider inclusion of equestrian trail in some greenways and open spaces where appropriate.

All paddle trails should follow the NC Department of Environment and Natural Resources (NC DENR) standards for paddle trail access sites. Paddle trails should also be developed in conformance with the NC DENR *How to build a paddle trail in your community* series.

- Ensure uniformity in NC DENR designated paddle trail access sites and paddle trails.
- Promote public safety and ensure public trust in designated paddle trail efforts.
- Allow for designated access sites and paddle trails to receive preferential treatment in grant funding cycles.
- Enable NC DENR State Trails to include designated access sites and paddle trails in their marketing and promotional efforts.



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- Promote community support and sustainability for access sites and trails.
- Provide the NC tourism industry with worry free access sites and trails.
- Enable more people to safely explore NC's water resources.
- Every access point should be built to a minimum Level 1 standard. The paddle trail access sites have five different levels ranging from "rustic" to "highly developed." Access point development meeting one of these standards gives the user an understanding that they are safe and open for public use.

This four-county plan documents the proposed overall trail network throughout the region. The recommendations cover the major components of the system. It is important that each community be responsible and completes a detailed sidewalk/trails master plan to fill gaps between the major trails and jurisdictions, providing connectivity throughout the region. These plans must be done in coordination with the adjacent communities to provide a comprehensive network of pedestrian trails and bikeways.



APPENDICES



APPENDIX A – PLANNING DOCUMENTS

The initial information which was gathered in order to begin to develop the Greater Hickory Recreation/Tourism Plan was the various reports, studies maps, and plans presently in place throughout the region. Many studies and plans have been completed and are in various stages of implementation. The region as a whole has done a very good job of resource identification and needs analysis. Below is a list of the plans received which served as a starting point in formulating the recommendations of the plan.

- Hickory By Choice (Hickory)
- Parks and Recreation Master Plan (Hickory)
- Greenway Master Plan (Hickory)
- Recreation Master Plans (Granite Falls)
- Municipal Long Range Plan (Granite Falls)
- Comprehensive Plan (in progress) (Gamewell)
- Caldwell Pathways Master Plan (Caldwell County) (Lenior)
- Wilson Creek Corridor Plan (Caldwell County)
- Colletsville Community Plan (Caldwell County)
- Yadkin Valley Community Plan (Caldwell County)
- Blue Ridge Heritage Plan (Caldwell County)
- Future Forward (Caldwell County)
- Sidewalk Plan drafted and created by town planner (Taylorsville)
- 2020 Vision Plan (Land Development Plan) (Maiden)
- Burke County Plan (Burke County)
- 2003 Land Dev Plan (Conover)
- 1986 Recreation Plan (USFS)
- Recreation Master Plan (Newton)
- Saint Pauls Area Plan (Newton)
- Eastside Area Plan (Newton)
- Rocky Face Master Plan (Carolina Land and Lakes RC&D)
- Paddle Trail Jacob and Henry Forks (Carolina Land and Lakes RC&D)
- 2002 Blueprint Burke Strategic Plan (Burke County)
- 2000 Burke County Comp Parks and Recreation Master Plan (Burke County)
- Lake James Phase II SAP (Burke County)
- Lake James State Park Master Plan (Burke County)
- Lake James Area Trails Implementation Plan (Burke County)
- Burke County Blue Ridge Heritage Plan (Burke County)
- Duke Power FERC Relicensing Agreement
- South Mountains State Park Master Plan (Burke County)
- Linville Falls Land Management and Recreation (NPS)
- Blue Ridge Parkway Land Management and Recreation (NPS)
- Mountains to Sea Trail Plans
- Over Mountain Victory National Historic Trail
- Foothills Conservancy
- Target Market Study (Drexel)
- Comprehensive Plan (underway) (Lenior)
- Lenior Aquatic/Fitness Center marketing Study (Lenior)
- Greenway project tabled due to cost of one bridge (Claremont)
- Long Range Plan (Cajahs Mountain)
- In process of creating a Parks Master Plan (Catawba County)
 - Small Areas Plans within the County (Catawba Co)
- Multi-purpose facility feasibility study coordinated by Catawba County Chamber of Commerce in 2003 (Hickory)
- Open space prospectus done in the late 1960s for development of recreational amenities on the Catawba River area (Caldwell County, Pathways)
- Dusty Ridge Park Project (Alexander County)
- Citizen Survey (Hudson)
- Recreation Master Plan (Morganton)



APPENDIX B – LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

One of the initial tasks in the plan development was to ask the local governments, chambers of commerce, non-profit groups, and other stakeholders a series of questions to gain a detailed look at what was needed, expected and the associated ideas for the recreation/tourism plan. Below are the responses to those questions which indeed help foster the recommendations contained within the plan.

What are your expected outcomes that you would like to see from the results of the recreation initiative vision plan?

- Increased tourism and recreation
- Additional open space preservation
- Public water front access
- More regional functions
- An asset to the town and its citizens
- A marketing plan based on historical, cultural and recreation assets rather than political boundaries
- A plan for connectivity of assets
- Economic impact
- Grant approval for enhancement or upgrade of current facilities
- Alternative recreation ideas
- Walking history trails, bike trails
- Coordination of marketing throughout region
- Connection of recreation facilities or joint facilities
- Funding be made more available to smaller areas
- Coordination of facilities and events that would not step on each partner in the region
- Project(s) that would boost the economy/quality of life in the region
- Preservation and public access to the water ways and state/national forest in the region
- Identify potential creek greenways (Lyle Creek), park sites and extension of Catawba River Trail to Hunsucker Park in Catawba (future Lyle Creek access)
- Public access to and more protection of natural areas
- A strategic plan to coordinate existing and identify new opportunities related to cultural and recreational amenities that will attract outside visitors and enhance quality of life in the region
- An innovative plan that includes all types of recreation that expands beyond the City of Hickory municipal limits
- There is a need for more family oriented recreation opportunities and facilities in Eastern Burke Co
- Other facilities will work with park connectability
- Don't know enough about the plan to comment
- Make sure that we are involved
- In eastern end of Burke Co not enough parks, hard to connect
- Need for additional greenway
- A plan that displays all recreation facilities in the study area and that demonstrates how facilities can be maximized in terms of use
- An increase in visitors to aid eco-tourism
- Formation of a regional guidance document
- Development of a regional "clearing house"
- Development of mega-projects/events
- Economic impact statistics generate to "sell" concepts and projects to the public and elected officials
- Support for the protection of critical lands needed to diversify local economy and preserve natural resources or viewsheds
- A comprehensive plan that incorporates recreation opportunities to the areas most in need of economic revitalization such as the smaller towns
- A thorough description of all services in study area
- Impact parks/recreation/greenways has on people and their desire to live and visit places where these amenities are available
- A dichotomy of the different leisure activities in the region
- A document which would provide documented research evidence that goes to the feasibility and marketability of recreation-based economic development
- See some type of park that would go through Cajahs Mountain. Town does not have facilities, needs ballfield and walking tract



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- A marketing plan that links to all regional attractions and than a recreation tourism based website for the Unifour
- Identification of mega-strategy; further regional cooperation; potential economic impact ; identification of potential open space opportunities
- Greater awareness of the recreational amenities available to residents and visitors or potential transplants to the area
- Renovation/additions to existing parks and facilities to include area of more diversified activities that would meet the “needs” of older adults and very young children/families
- Directory al ALL parks and recreational opportunities for the region
- An awareness of needs and economic impact
- Coordination of facilities, programs, and events in region to compliment one vision

What are your key issues that you feel need to be addressed?

- Lake Hickory Access (boating, fishing, swimming, etc.)
- Developing plans that are beneficial to all parts of the Metro region
- Money to pay for the projects
- Where do we concentrate limited resources? Biggest bang for the buck.
- Need for small business support with recreation focus
- What niche or gap can we fill that other areas in region do not meet?
- Grant approval
- Cost and interest
- Marketing
- Diverse set of recreational opportunities
- Funding for smaller communities
- Preservation of natural resources
- Infrastructure for quality of life issues
- How recreation is a vital aspect of quality of life and economic development efforts
- Not enough recreation facilities for county residents (active recreation)
- Identification of major existing assets—how do we take advantage of these assets and expand them so that they have a positive economic impact on the region?
- For Alexander County there is a need for non-ball related recreation. Passive activities such as trails, etc.
- Multi-use sports facility/complex
- Indoor Olympic swimming pool for competition events
- Walking paths/trails
- Connectability
- Infrastructure—narrow roads
- Connection of walking trails and bike lanes between municipalities
- More regional recreation activities in this area (i.e., bowling alley, skating area, etc)
- Access (public)
- Communications, make as user friendly
- Needs to be facilities in rural area, with economic downturn its hard to construct facilities
- YMCA would be a large draw
- Future greenways
- Crucial nature or Duke & Crescent to start local government financial
- Who will use the facilities in the future
- Plan needs to address all socioeconomic elements of the region in terms of facilities and programs
- Plan should balance recommendations
- Increase quality of life, equal balance of development with environmental issues
- Coordination of “small” visions—connectivity, events scheduling/coordination, identification of minor facility needs
- Cooperation of “big” visions—regional connectivity, economic impact analysis, impact projects and events that join the region
- Recreation opportunities that incorporate the small towns in Burke County and utilize our natural resources (proximity to mountains, Lake James, etc.
- Positive impact of parks/recreation/special events on economic impact in four counties
- Good safe walking path



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- List of free exhibits for families
- Health and wellness, transportation alternatives, quality of life factors, environmental protection, job creation (tourism retail and service industry)
- Feasibility (can we afford it)
- Connectivity in regional planning
- Public access to Lake Hickory; How to best utilize existing P&R facilities; identify what is lacking in needed P&R facilities; tie in with tourism efforts; coordination of major events
- Education
- Keeping parks and recreation facilities adequate, clean and safe
- Making everything senior citizen friendly
- Special areas for “fitness” exercises
- Special areas for little people and pets
- Bicycle/walking trails, even bicycle space along roadways
- Educational trails/facilities that highlight “things” that are native to the area
- Inequities among local governments about who pays for recreation. Great natural resources outside of municipal boundaries with no funding for upkeep
- Regional survey to determine need for additional facilities and programs and the most strategic location

What existing park or recreation facilities need the most improvement? Are there amenities that need to be added or removed?

- Geitner Park boat launch is in need of improvement—boat ramp is also too shallow
- Public waterfront walkways could be added around Lake Hickory and the Catawba River
- The region has plenty of nice athletic facilities. We need more amenities for individual or family use, camp sites would be nice
- Add a park beside Gamewell Medical Center
- Wilson Creek (signage, trail maintenance, road improvement)
- Boone Fork campground
- WRC Buffalo Tract
- Long View Recreation Park on 2nd Avenue NW, not sure about amenities at this time
- Matheson Park is a major drawing card and is used by many students from surrounding counties
- YMCA added expansion
- Skate park has been most requested by local citizens
- Existing park needs new restrooms and shelter and walking trail
- Lenoir Aquatic/Fitness center needs update and refurbishment
- Lenoir’s sidewalks need refurbished and new sidewalks need to be installed for citizens and tourists
- FERC license draft plans to expand Hunsucker Park on Catawba to Lyle Creek. This would provide the only public access point to Lake Norman/Catawba River for this area.
- R. O. Huffman recreation center complex (50,000 SF building)**—needs general maintenance improvements as well as improvements to athletic fields and playground
- The region has not yet fully taken advantage of the existing lake and related uses including restaurants, retail, docks and camping facilities
- Develop a bike and pedestrian trail system interconnected throughout the region
- Jaycee Park (Taylorsville) needs improvement
- More opportunities (other than ball related) in the southern end of the county
- The town would like to see a greenway developed along Island Creek extending to the Catawba River
- New addition will take care of most needs (Lake James State Park)
- Hildebran does not have any public recreation facilities
- Boone Fork Area
- Possibility for special use permit to construct facilities—public/private partnership
- Need park and community center, places for skateboarders, biking trails, no place for ATVs and dirt bikes
- Largest needs for additional ballfields
- Gym space
- Spraygrounds
- Soccer



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- Outdoor volleyball
- Dogparks
- Trails and bikepaths
- Picnic sites in scenic settings
- Rocky Face needs infrastructure
- State park expansions
- County (Burke) park site on Lake James
- Lake James Loop Trail
- Over Mountain Victory National Historic Trail and Interpretive Center at Lake James SP
- Additional public access to Catawba River
- Gamelands at confluence of Johns River and Lake Rhodhiss
- Johns River trail
- Blueways on Henry Fork and Jacobs Fork
- Central Greenway (Morganton to Valdese)
- Connector trails—OVNHT to South Mountain State Park
- Rail Trail—Hickory to Lake Hickory (if rail is inactive)
- Eastern greenway
- Equestrian connector trail from Lake James SP to Pisgah National Forest
- Bikelanes on NC126 at Lake James
- Henry Fork Greenway
- Lenoir—West End Park
- The Claremont City Park will be upgraded by? 07-08
- Sigmon Park operated by Claremont Optimist Club needs to be enlarged
- Connectivity between existing sites: linkages along riparian corridors in the form of greenways and blueways
- Do not have any in town
- We would like to increase acreage for passive recreation and preservation
- Greenway and trail system
- Access to Lake Hickory
- J. E. Brodyhill park, Martin Luther King Center, West End Community Park, Boone Fork recreation area, Wilson Creek, Johns River and all waterways in the county, Hibriten Mountain area, aquatic and Fitness center
- Every county-owned park in Alexander County needs repair, improvement, updating, and/or completion
- Recreation center and an upgrade to our pool—outdoor public pool use is decreasing—pools need “gimmick” to get folks to use the facility—water park type
- Morganton area—recreation center and older parks need most improvements or renovation—would like to see more specialized recreation areas such as roller hockey rinks, outdoor adventure parks, camping areas, remote control hobbies parks (planes, cars, etc)

What partnerships need to be initiated, strengthened, or expanded in the region as it applies in the delivery of parks, recreation facilities, programs, and tourism?

- Better media coverage
- Handout for visitors to the Hickory Metro showing locations of facilities in the four county area
- US Forest Service
- NC Wildlife Resource Commission
- Hickory Metro Tourism Group
- State Legislature and Congressional representatives
- Partnership between local governments and the state need to be strengthened
- Grant programs offered as an alternative to traditional PARTF grants
- Rehabilitation grants for sidewalk improvements and outdated infrastructure
- Regional meetings/cooperation of recreation directors
- Coordination with Catawba County EDC
- Greenways need to be connected—coordination, coordination, coordination
- Hopefully this plan will cause everyone to work together to enhance quality of life and boost the economy through retirees and tourism



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- Inventory/brochures were a good start. At some point we may want to make our recreational opportunities more widely known through public education and marketing. Tourism authority may be best suited to achieve this
- Money—operating funds needed
- Regional recreation groups, wildlife services, Duke Power, Future Forward, CVB, State Tourism, Federal Park system
- I think you will find plenty of partnership within the governments, associations with community development organizations and better communications with parents would be a plus
- Local governments need to work more closely with schools to develop and share facilities
- Continue to work with US Forest Service Park Service
- Partnerships between municipalities (across county lines)
- Strengthen partnerships and cooperation between private recreation leagues (such as basketball and softball and indoor soccer)
- WPCOG effort to get everyone together, get a dialogue
- There should be a way to get funding for recreation facilities that are growing. You have infrastructure, need a place in eastern part of (Burke) county
- Local governments working together to build and maintain
- Coordination of league and tournament sporting events
- Database of officials, coaches and instructors
- Regional tourism/recreation
- Travel/Tourism and EDC professionals
- Planners and recreation professionals
- Regional board to coordinate efforts
- Regional project work sessions and not informational meetings
- Parks and recreation seem to flourish in the urban areas of the region. Emphasis should be placed on incorporating the rural communities in this process
- YMCA, private gymnasiums and local parks all showing the benefits of physical activity
- The YMCA could provide a part in the planning, the Catawba Valley YMCA and the Alexander County YMCA could do things without or with fee or membership
- Partnerships between public and the private sector as well as non-profits
- More regional cooperation
- Marketing regional attractions
- Coordination with local CVB, EDC, and Sports Commission
- US Forest Service, Grandfather Mountain, Inc.
- State Parks and Recreation, DENR, USA-NRCS, local governments, boards of education, YMCAs, local businesses, chambers of commerce, AARP, local COAs and other organizations on aging, law enforcement, historical societies and arts and science organizations
- County wide recreation programs or even region wide
- Expanded partnerships with schools, special interest clubs, local governments and private business

If you could change one thing in parks, recreation and leisure in the next five to ten years what would it be?

- Increased accessibility in all demographics
- More focus on leisure activities that can be enjoyed for a lifetime
- Add greenway along Lower Creek in Gamewell
- Accessibility—Resource Guide
- Better understanding by public of available resources
- Better facilities
- Improve existing sidewalks, nature trails and bike pathways
- Implement Ecotrails to address runoff and conservation issues
- Increased participation and recreation opportunities
- Walkability and creation of non-motorized trails
- Acquire more land through grants and create additional recreation opportunities
- Adequate funding to maintain the existing facilities at a higher level
- Elected officials need to understand the economic impacts of recreation
- Interconnection of park facilities through a greenway system
- Regional interaction, less competition for \$, more cooperation to benefit all



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- To provide recreational opportunities for all ages
- No scheduling of competitive sports events on Sundays
- Ability to provide for more people—overcrowding
- Better partnerships between municipalities
- More money
- Get away from ballfields and develop more fitness type facilities
- Need to better control vandalism
- Greenways connecting the entire region
- Increase funding for PARTF work through local legislatures
- Greater understanding of the value of linear connectivity and passive recreation
- Value to community beyond the traditional cost-benefit analysis
- Better access to programs and facilities
- A commitment to implement
- More inclusiveness outside the urban hubs of the metro region
- Marketing/publicity of services offered—more info needs to be available
- Use the park for musical events for the family
- Get industry to use park for company events, picnics, game day, employee fellowship
- Provide more overnight camping opportunities
- More things for kids, more playgrounds
- Expand passive recreation opportunities and preserve large acreage naturally significant sites because of tremendous growth in the region these opportunities will be lost in 10 to 15 years
- The perception that P&R is not as important as public safety, streets, schools, etc. as it pertains to quality of life issues for our citizens
- Alter the depression era mentality of some elected officials regarding recreational services and consider it a type of loss leader that will entice further development and investment in the area
- Larger areas that could provided young families a safe and inexpensive environment to bring small children and pets for play and picnic
- Baby Boomer hit 60 this year—the number of older adults that enjoy outdoor activities and sports is growing—there needs to be a wide variety of “spaces” to provide safe and inexpensive fun and fitness activities
- Parks that include educational facilities that have vegetation, displays, sheltered places to sit and enjoy the surrounding—perhaps landscaped with herbs, native flora and fauna, etc.—displays could include historical information, pictures, tools, etc.
- More money for facilities and upkeep, especially smaller communities
- Would love to see more facilities in our area with regional draw and appeal. Also, these facilities should be operated by professional recreation personnel. I find that there are less and less municipal and county recreation programs that operate their own programs. This has led to many less talented and less financial able participates excluded from participation

What is your vision for parks and recreation, tourism in the Hickory Metro region in the next five to 10 years? Are there any missed opportunities?

- See the plan for the “Soccer Complex” to Bakers Mountain come to fruition
- Missed opportunities: public accessibility to water
- More regional activities focusing on the Metro region, not individual municipalities
- I think with the decline of manufacturing we need to attract tourists and retirees
- Name recognition on regards to PR and tourism
- Facilities to host major events
- No missed opportunities that I know of
- Continued growth from Charlotte region will help to create growth and opportunities in this area
- We have an abundance of natural resources in the region that we must utilize for the recreation and tourism industry. We’ve got to be smarter in the way we plan and work together in this area.
- The creation of more parks/greenways/trails and/or expansion of existing facilities
- Need more attractions to keep tourists in the area longer to spend more money
- Expand facilities to take advantage of already untapped natural resources
- Expansion of lake access and related facilities
- I do not feel that I could adequately speak for other portions of the metro region



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- Duke Power is taking great initiative through the relicensing agreement to provide additional recreational areas, including swimming beaches
- We need more athletic facilities like ball fields, basketball courts, etc.
- ? to ? through FERC process
- Acquire properties
- Develop a local park in Hildebran that provides connections to other recreational facilities
- Unique opportunity on lakes, dispersed recreation needs, have to provide utilities, provide basic amenities
- With growth on lakes, there needs to be a regional water park
- There needs to be areas on lakes for skiers and jet skiers (buoys) courses
- A set of interlocking departments that are interlocking
- Missed opportunities not in Duke app
- A system of established for coordinating communication for agencies throughout the region
- Lacrosse programs
- Fitness and wellness
- Ultimate Frisbee golf courses
- Bike trails within and connecting the region
- Work through regional eco-tourism group
- Local governments need to work together
- Implementation of regional plans—Lake James, Johns River, Burke County Recreation MP, Small Area Plan recreation projects
- Four to five star lodge at Lake James
- Cross jurisdictional connectivity beginning
- Mega-event concept—Catawba Run to Queen Charlotte idea
- I would like to see us make greater use of our natural resources especially in a manner that fosters connectivity of communities and cultures (greenways, rafting, etc.)
- I support the effort to create a draw for large, regional sports tournaments
- I would like to see small fields in rural communities upgraded to tourney quality for overflow use during these events
- Growing state and growing area—need to be moving forward in park and recreation activities not o miss opportunities
- The park has to be more than just fun and games to attract tourists. The park needs something unique to get attention
- Concerts can be events?
- We need to partner with the Council for the Arts
- A shuttle service is needed for hiking, mountain biking, and paddling excursions, professional tour guides, a river trail map for the upper South fork drainage
- Have a long walking trail that goes through all the counties
- Increase education and preservation of our natural heritage
- Preservation of existing resources and development of new resources
- Catawba river corridor development, Hibriten Mountain recreational development; My vision would generally include better education of individuals to the availability and proper use of the natural resources in the area
- Having a large enough and interesting enough to attract interest from outside the region—educational trips to see, competitive events—would provide additional resources for P&R and additional revenues to the local business communities
- We have numerous museums in the region that could be promoted for tourism—“museum trail”—multi-day destination
- Train developed into similar fashion to Smoky Mountain Express on weekends
- Recreation agencies coordinate facilities and resources to bring large events to our region, this includes athletic, cultural, social and outdoor events

Do you think that Recreation in the Hickory Metro area provide an economic benefit to the region? If so, in what way could Parks and Recreation and the amenities of the region be enhanced to increase their economic contribution to the community?

- Yes, but not to the fullest extent possible
- Yes, more regional activities bringing in outside interest (i.e., Bridge to Bridge bike ride)



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- I think recreation is a draw for tourists. I think the area could do a better job in marketing some lesser known attractions (i.e., Tuttle State Forest)
- Yes, small business development, marketing strategy
- Quality of life promotion to get more industry
- Cleaner, safer, accessible facilities, connectivity, funding
- Very little of this in Long View
- Quality pedestrian friendly parks and sidewalks have proven to increase real estate values in areas adjacent to quality parks and clean areas that feature green spaces
- Yes, it can provide an economic benefit but better coordination is needed between municipalities and counties
- Inventory, map, publish and coordinate facilities and events in the 4 county region
- Work to build and connect trails in the region
- Anything that is done should be with the protection and preservation of the environment in mind, as this is what retirees and tourist are looking for
- Yes, by creating greenways and parks that have a wide appeal and then successfully making the public and people outside the region more aware
- Need a better marketing campaign
- Yes, better coordination between agencies and facilities
- Expand opportunities in natural locations (i.e., lakes, streams, forest trail system)
- Not sure at this time
- Yes, through the sale of tickets to sporting events
- Yes
- Yes, provides economic benefit
- Coordinated marketing of facilities
- Definitely opportunity for counties to think about opportunities
- Yes, if you build these things people will buy equipment, it becomes its own self supporting system
- Fitness = quality of life
- Not right now, possibly in the future
- Wilson Creek or Lake James natural resources geographic driven
- Yes, better mapping
- Yes, advertise the recreation amenities more of a unified effort in marketing
- Yes, projects have to be built for real economic development—Implementation
- Connectivity is necessary, not optional
- Coordinated marketing and event planning is needed
- Establishment of a travel and tourism business incubator site(s) and networking opps
- Parks and recreation certainly provide an opportunity for economic growth if it is designed to draw visitors to an area that can then benefit from the spending of its participants in the area. This is why sharing the wealth of parks and recreation with smaller, under utilized markets is important
- Yes, more numbers and economic impact studies and numbers (for what they are worth)—show the impact of services and special events in hard number form
- EDC needs to advise us on this. The areas needs to be a safe, clean and not in a back road pasture
- Placed where work traffic pass by going to work and going home
- Better funding for park employees and increased hours of operation
- For certain areas such as Wilson Creek
- Yes, 50,000 people a year visit Catawba County parks, approximately 30 percent are from other areas including Charlotte Metro
- Yes, regional identity and marketing
- Yes, through activities such as Bridge-to-Bridge and facilities such as the Aquatic and Fitness Center with its service potential
- Having the Crawdads should be having an effect—we have lakes and mountains, local history and special events including an outdoor drama, street festivals, campgrounds, local rodeos, gem mines, paddle boat, waterwheel mill, covered bridge—if we could host some sports events or boast of something that is unique to our region, yes
- More promotion, signage, restrooms and things like Bridge-to-Bridge
- Provides a tremendous amount of economic benefit to the region at a time when it is most needed. Assure future facilities are constructed to exceed today's standards so that we will be competitive to attract events



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What five words best describe the Hickory Metro region?

- Opportunity—Industry—Accessibility—Hospitality
- Potential
- Blend of Urban and Rural
- Diverse—Good Location—Arts—Climate—Water
- Safe—Friendly—Value Added—Growing
- Sprawling—Uncoordinated Growth—Fragile—Good Opportunities
- Upper Catawba River Valley
- Good People—Great Living
- Excellent natural areas—good shopping areas—inadequate housing in Burke County—good education opportunities
- Scenic—commerce—entrepreneurial—cooperative—culturally diverse
- Service oriented—growing
- Scenic—rural—mountains—waterways—opportunity
- Wilderness
- Economically fragile—diverse—good cooperation on joint endeavors—growing—good potential
- Have not been in area long enough
- Large and small town with individual needs
- Lack of identity
- Proactive—optimistic—innovative—visionary—entrepreneurial
- Convenient access to varied resources
- Unrealized potential—naturally beautiful, but rusty—sprawling—connected by river—conservative
- Diverse—competitive—family-oriented—growing—changing (economically)
- Inexpensive—plentiful—organized—integrity—diversified
- Modern—pastoral—scenic—post-industrial—engaging
- Furniture—Hickory Crawdads—Wilson Creek
- Gateway to the West—Diversity in Natural Heritage—Piedmont to Mountains tradition
- Potential—opportunities—cooperation
- Diverse
- Scenic—Diverse—Growing—Historical—Unemployment
- Wild and Scenic River (Wilson Creek)—lakes—trails—Natural Resources—Historical
- Accessible—Natural—Variety—Potential—Growth

Please write any additional comments and suggestions below and on the back of this sheet:

- County recreation center (Catawba)
- More involvement from community
- We need a swimming pool, a multi-use sports complex and tracks and trails to provide passive recreation opportunities (Rutherford College)
- Try to develop funding
- Setup a meeting with state legislators to describe what we are doing and encourage to help us in Raleigh
- On the future, Blackburn landfill will have facilities to demonstrate environmentally friendly uses of methane gas
- Idea for name of plan: The METRO Plan (The Maximizing Economic, Tourism and Recreational Opportunities Plan), the name speaks to a regional approach and economic impact through the protection and use of opportunities of natural resources and recreation facilities.
- Catawba County Parks is primarily focused on passive recreation and the preservation of large acreage naturally significant sites. For more info visit Catawba County homepage and under departments click Parks.
- The W. B. Stronach Aquatic and Fitness Center is a great recreational resource that is being underutilized. The 50 meter outdoor pool should be made year-round to accommodate multiple usage groups simultaneously. This is a wonderful recreational and economic plum for the entire area.
- Recreation emphasis is about providing a way for individuals and families to be healthy and happy. This will then translate into economic benefit. For the young, a positive experience created by participation in recreational and cultural activities could lessen the cost of providing and maintaining



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correctional institutions. For the older population, staying active means life spent at home rather than in a long term care facility. Being healthy and moving rather than tapping into the expensive healthcare system (Medicare/Medicaid). Older adults can provide volunteer services or serve as paid staff, even for recreational and cultural/educational activities and events. The cost of providing recreational opportunities would seem to be far less than the cost of institutionalization of either the young or the elderly. Any location that provides these kinds of opportunities would be attractive to those looking to invest their lives and money. Also, and very important, is the fact that we have several institutions of higher learning to draw from.

- Funding, funding, funding
- I am a firm believer in recreations part in economic development in our region. I also think it is up to professional recreation personnel to assure there is a balance to first provide for our local citizens as well as offer facilities and programs to attract outside dollars.



APPENDIX C – PUBLIC INPUT MEETING RESPONSES

At the beginning of the planning process, a series of public meetings were held in each of the four counties to gain the public's ideas and perception of recreation and tourism amenities, improvements, and needs in the region. After a short presentation at the beginning of the meeting discussing the background and purpose of the plan, those in attendance were divided into groups and a working session followed. Each of the groups was asked a series of questions. The answers to those questions provided specific information and ideas to explore during the development of the plan. Below are the comments collected at each of the four meetings.

Alexander County—March 30, 2006

What recreation opportunities are important to our region?

- Emerald mine
- Festivals (Apple, Hiddenite Festival)
- Upper Catawba River Trail
- Amphitheater-outdoor concerts
- More public access
- Hang-gliding
- More game land designated areas/deer hunting (example: Chestnut Hunting Club)
- Extreme sports (marathons, triathlons)
- Canoe access for Lower Little River
- Agritourism—apple orchards, wineries, molasses
- Enhancement of Rocky Face—potential
- Rock climbing
- Improve quality of parks for tournaments, etc. (upgrade)
- Soccer
- More open space/picnic areas
- More trails
- Railroad project—tourist train from Taylorsville to Statesville
- More bicycle trails
- Promote county being home of Harry Gant

How can we promote our region and increase tourism?

- Tour of activities
- Need for hotels
- Welcome packets for recreational events
- Improvements to city, county, chamber websites
- Increased advertisements—TV, radio, newspaper
- LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION centrally located between many areas
- Linking recreation opportunities together
- Quality of life
- Promoting enough outside of political boundaries
- More accessibility and staff for parks
- Create a Unifour Recreation Directors Group
- Promote local sports teams (example state high school champions)

How can we link, connect, coordinate our regions natural and cultural resources?

- Increasing cooperation with local school systems (Alexander, Burke, Caldwell, Catawba, Newton and Hickory)
- Cooperation with area Chambers of Commerce—create a joint chamber that promotes the Catawba Valley and Foothills
- Emphasis on TEAM approach instead of individuals to get things accomplished
- Coordination between government public access channels
- Develop common tours in counties (wineries, historic areas, agricultural, etc)
- More cooperation between recreation departments
- Develop a tourism book



APPENDIX C – PUBLIC INPUT MEETING RESPONSES

- An identifier that represents ALL

Burke County—April 6, 2006 (Group 1)

What recreation opportunities are important to our region?

- Water sports (fishing canoeing, boating)
- Programmed athletics, TEAMSPORTS
- Extreme sports/adventure recreation
- Game management and recreation lands (hunting and fishing)
- Hiking
- Biking—mountain and touring, recreational
- Heritage tourism (Trail of Faith)
- Bird watching
- Wild flower/fall leaf observation
- Wineries
- Camping RV/private
- Jogging and road racing
- Shopping, crafts, antiques
- Rope course/team building
- Equestrian opportunities
- Festivals/special events
- COMMA/Waldensian dramas/arts
- Universal designed programs/inclusive (persons with disabilities)

How can we promote our region and increase tourism?

- Use existing expertise to sponsor national events (example: adventure race highlights natural beauty)
- Marathons/½ marathon
- I-40 advertising at welcome centers
- Target advertising at various events/groups/ages/sex groups
- Good signage/directional/info/national and local marketing materials (i.e., placemats in restaurants)
- Hospitality training
- Promote trout fishing (Catawba River below Lake James/Pisgah National Forest/South Mountain State Park)
- Unify travel/tourism agencies
- Develop touring opportunities
- Utilize NC welcome centers
- Create better infrastructure for visitors
- Create a means of marketing revenue
- Create planning/regional coordination

How can we link, coordinate the Region's Natural Resources?

- Share info about regional attributes
- Well developed web page/linked to important portals agencies, recreation departments
- Regional tourism agency or group
- Unique school(s) that highlights regions arts/heritage crafts etc.
- Preplan events that are coordinated with activities
- Examine ethnic opportunities and events in the region
- Find regional common facilities to build unified large events
- Photography events/natural art events
- Regional conference center project
- Regional amphitheater that promotes beauty of region
- Regional resort
- Regional camp for national groups
- Using regional history to promote region (archeological sites)



APPENDIX C – PUBLIC INPUT MEETING RESPONSES

Burke County—April 6, 2006 (Group 2)

What recreation opportunities are important to our region?

- Cycling (not currently friendly) road and off-road
- River—fishing, canoeing, greenways
- Outdoor recreation businesses
- Greenways (period ?) extended
- Archeological (old stuff) attractions
- Swimming facility (Olympic quality existing)
- Preserve “feel” of downtown “clustering” while maintaining sense of place
- Active involvement (promotion also)
- Not—existing events such as helicopter tours
- Ballfields—regional events
- Attract outdoor recreation business to downtown

How can we promote our region and increase tourism?

- Web linkages—county centers of information
- Ensure quality:
 - Gatlinburg vs. Adirondacks
 - Maintain/improve natural resources
 - Attract “respectful”
- Need guides/information (job creation)
- Hotels—currently feast/famine
- Draws on natural (real) resources, not “plastic”
- Style used to promote—work on design event type
- Youth oriented promotion—inner city youths to rural recreation
- Greater regional promotion, not just local
- Co-promotion of events
- Combine/coordinate marketing efforts
- Promotion event staff use community resources not just local governments

How can we link coordinate our regions natural resources?

- Greenways to connect green industry
- Look for means of supporting economy—“missing links”
- Corporate funding for promotion—selective (matching needs/goals)
- Healthy active living
- Bicycle lanes—identify key routes, safe, scenic, loops—connect schools, home-to-town, parks
- Educate elected officials
- Concentrate resource on key linkages
- Link businesses (recreation) to downtown

Caldwell County—March 16, 2006 (Group 1)

What recreation opportunities are important to our region?

- Walking trails
- Equine activities
- Improve existing recreation facilities
- Take advantage of exiting waterways (Wilson Creek, Johns River, Catawba River)
- Fitness opportunities (special lanes for cyclists)
- Athletic fields (active recreation)
- Create better opportunities to enjoy scenic highways (scenic highway designation)
- Promote camping
- Horseback trails (more)
- Promote water sports such as swimming, canoeing and kayaking



APPENDIX C – PUBLIC INPUT MEETING RESPONSES

- Rock Climbing
- Promote historical heritage
- Opportunities with existing rail line

How can we promote our region and increase tourism?

- Orientation and instruction to promote area what we have to offer and how to be safe (cut down on lost hikers)
- Comprehensive and updated recreation plan/guide
- Market Wilson Creek and other region streams at Whitewater Park in Charlotte
- Comprehensive trail guide (where visitors can stay)
- Explore areas for more designated ATV's trails and promote
- Invest in comprehensive marketing plan
- Blend cultural/recreation activities
- Revitalize and promote downtowns in the region
- Promote organic farming

How can we link, connect, coordinate our regions natural and cultural resources?

- Improve communication
- Develop a guide and brochure that lists all activities and events quarterly make available on internet, phones books and chambers
- Develop activity trails throughout the region for like activities (pottery, wine)
- Create a regional authority to coordinate all activities
- Educate people in the community about what exists so they can get the word out to people outside of the region
- Work to promote and not have competition among activities.

Caldwell County—March 16, 2006 (Group 2)

What recreation opportunities are important to our region?

- Water, boating
- Hiking, walking, mountains
- Biking—road and mountain
- Horseback riding, rodeo
- Golfing
- Fishing
- Field sports
- Gardens
- Swimming
- Skateboarding
- Cultural opportunities, music, art, religious, dance
- Playground
- Talking trees
- Pathways
- Picnic areas
- Recreation programs
- Historic/Heritage sites
- Car shows
- Auto racing
- Ideal climate
- Hunting
- Bowling and indoor recreation, roller skating
- Antiques



APPENDIX C – PUBLIC INPUT MEETING RESPONSES

How can we promote our region and increase tourism?

- Website, more links
- Maps—current and ones
- Advertisements
- Theme/Motto/Brand for region
- Special events
- Calendar of events
- Information center/welcome center
- Visit 1-800-visitnc
- Strong regional host group that has marketing plan
- Identify consumer groups
- Linkages with other similar organizations in and out of region
- Use existing media
- Sell to ourselves
- Avoid/negatives of tourism
- Develop a visitor guide
- Create our own “handmade” project similar to Handmade in America
- Good information for visitors at hotels and restaurants

How can we link, connect, coordinate our region’s natural and cultural resources for the benefit to all?

- Communication with each other/counties talking to each other.
- Greenways/Blueways
- Theme trails such as birds, fish, bikes and horse
- Connectivity
- Be more bold, proactive, involved in planning
- List of specialized media and use accordingly
- Connection of like things or attractions between towns
- Quarterly magazine/newsletter
- Coordinate like events across county/counties
- Develop a system for information
- Create a mega volunteer pool
- Tour ourselves to neighboring counties
- Develop kiosk

Caldwell County—March 16, 2006 (Group 3)

What recreation opportunities are important to our region?

- Hiking
- Rodeo (Equine)
- Historical “Trails”
- Natural beauty
- Rock climbing
- Hang gliding
- Sporting events (team)
- Racing
- Yard sales
- Cycling (Road cycle)
- Boating/kayak/canoe
- Birds
- Festivals
- Back country recreation



APPENDIX C – PUBLIC INPUT MEETING RESPONSES

How can we promote our region and increase tourism?

- Have a website that can provide detailed directions to get people to the tourism site
- Family tours: get the word out to people who can bring people to the region
- Relocation tourist
- Trade shows
- Market as “best kept secrets”
- Regional based material
- Caldwell aligns itself with north of Lenoir “Blue Ridge Foothills”

How can we link, connect, coordinate our region’s natural and cultural resources for the benefit to all?

- Website linkage with other counties and cities
- Greenways/trails
- Regional event such as Tour De Catawba Valley
- “Passport” approach
- Documentaries/education

Catawba County—March 23, 2006 (Group 1)

What recreation opportunities are important to our region?

- Water
- Golf
- Biking
- Hiking
- Develop activities for winter for people that do not ski in mountains
- Senior activities
- League activities—regional, competition
- Music festival—competition
- Adventure/extreme race/triathlons
- Naturalist opportunities (birding)

How can we promote our region and increase tourism?

- Website
- Advertise at rest area
- Common marketing—ad agency (travel and tourism)
- Find appropriate ad-agency
- Quality of life/health

How can we link, connect, coordinate our regions natural and cultural resources?

- Unifour recreation directors and like agencies get together
- Look beyond local government borders
- Use schools as a connection
- Quality of life
- Climate
- Bike lanes
- Greenways
- Over coordination



APPENDIX C – PUBLIC INPUT MEETING RESPONSES

Catawba County—March 23, 2006 (Group 2)

What recreation opportunities are important to our region?

- Paddle trails
- Expanded greenways using floodplains and sewer rights-of-way
- Bike paths (both on street and trails)
- Restaurants on the lake—boat to eat
- Shuttle service along Catawba to back to starting point
- Lake access (launch ramps, swim areas)
- Tie into NASCAR—history of Hickory Race Track
- Promotion of local outdoor events—Lake Hickory Triathlons, bike rides, Greater Hickory Open

How can we promote our region and increase tourism?

- Website
- Local media involvement (free)
- Brochures in Metro Center
- Regional media outlets—Charlotte, Asheville
- Billboards along I-40
- ROAM magazine
- Tie in Paddle trail to Whitewater Center
- Promote rapids of streams for paddling in counties
- Hiddenite/geologic
- Cultural/historic opportunities (pottery trail, Bunker Hill Covered Bridge)
- Self guided tours of cultural/historic sites
- Have trade shows (biking, camping etc)

How can we link, connect, coordinate our regions natural and cultural resources?

- Crossover effect—bikes > rivers > (kayak, canoe)
- Greenway from Lake James to Lake Norman
- Web site
- Outdoor outfitter to rent bikes, canoes and provide shuttle service (pick-up—drop-off)
- Promote regional manufacturing of outdoor goods/product testing
- Trade show for outdoor goods (buyers and Suppliers)
- Natural resource area inventory (waterfalls, rapids, swim holes, unique plants and animals)
- Unified—multi-sport guide for area
- Green minded sports

In addition, two people spoke. Dr. Mark Hawkins spoke about the need to develop healthy areas. He mentioned that healthy communities lead to a better quality of life and that can attract companies and retirees to an area. He also distributed a handout on childhood overweight in North Carolina.

Rick Grant talked about the Catawba Valley Paddle Trail Association and their plans to develop access areas along the Henry Fork, Jacobs Fork, and South Fork of the Catawba River. Mr. Grant said that a couple of accesses have been secured and they have a plan which he distributed to the group that showed potential access points. The river trail could ultimately connect to the Whitewater Park on Lake Wylie which could be a huge boost to tourism in our area.

